

THE CAMBRIDGE BIBLE COMMENTARY

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

*General Editors: P. R. ACKROYD, A. R. C. LEANEY, J. W. PACKER*

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EXODUS

COMMENTARY BY

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## GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

The aim of this series is to provide the text of the New English Bible closely linked to a commentary in which the results of modern scholarship are made available to the general reader. Teachers and young people have been especially kept in mind. The commentators have been asked to assume no specialized theological knowledge, and no knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. Bare references to other literature and multiple references to other parts of the Bible have been avoided. Actual quotations have been given as often as possible.

The completion of the New Testament part of the series in 1967 provides a basis upon which the production of the much larger Old Testament and Apocrypha series can be undertaken. The welcome accorded to the series has been an encouragement to the editors to follow the same general pattern, and an attempt has been made to take account of criticisms which have been offered. One necessary change is the inclusion of the translators' footnotes since in the Old Testament these are more extensive, and essential for the understanding of the text.

Within the severe limits imposed by the size and scope of the series, each commentator will attempt to set out the main findings of recent biblical scholarship and to describe the historical background to the text. The main theological issues will also be critically discussed.

Much attention has been given to the form of the volumes. The aim is to produce books each of which will be read consecutively from first to last page. The intro-

## GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

ductory material leads naturally into the text, which itself leads into the alternating sections of the commentary.

The series is accompanied by three volumes of a more general character. *Understanding the Old Testament* sets out to provide the larger historical and archaeological background, to say something about the life and thought of the people of the Old Testament, and to answer the question 'Why should we study the Old Testament?'. *The Making of the Old Testament* is concerned with the formation of the books of the Old Testament and Apocrypha in the context of the ancient near eastern world, and with the ways in which these books have come down to us in the life of the Jewish and Christian communities. *Old Testament Illustrations* contains maps, diagrams and photographs with an explanatory text. These three volumes are designed to provide material helpful to the understanding of the individual books and their commentaries, but they are also prepared so as to be of use quite independently.

P. R. A.

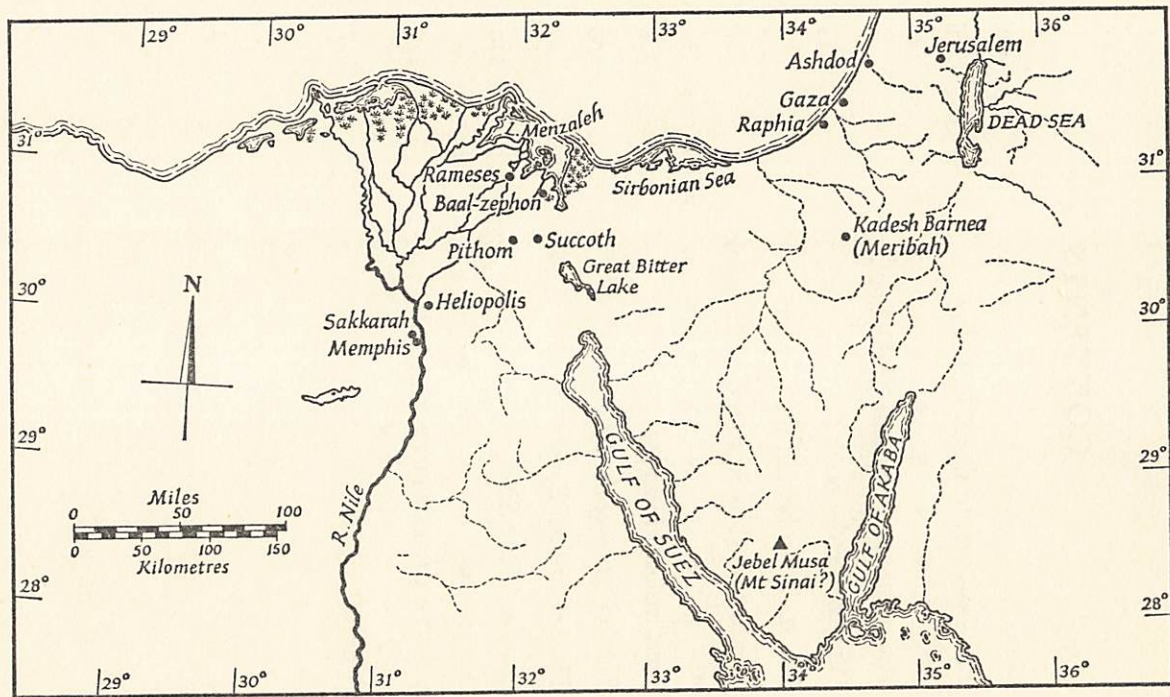
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## THE FOOTNOTES TO THE N.E.B. TEXT

The footnotes to the N.E.B. text are designed to help the reader either to understand particular points of detail – the meaning of a name, the presence of a play upon words – or to give information about the actual text. Where the Hebrew text appears to be erroneous, or there is doubt about its precise meaning, it may be necessary to turn to manuscripts which offer a different wording, or to ancient translations of the text which may suggest a better reading, or to offer a new explanation based upon conjecture. In such cases, the footnotes supply very briefly an indication of the evidence, and whether the solution proposed is one that is regarded as possible or as probable. Various abbreviations are used in the footnotes.

(1) Some abbreviations are simply of terms used in explaining a point: *ch(s)*., chapter(s); *cp.*., compare; *lit.*., literally; *mng.*., meaning; *MS(S)*., manuscript(s), i.e. Hebrew manuscript(s), unless otherwise stated; *om.*., omit(s); *or*., indicating an alternative interpretation; *poss.*., possible; *prob.*., probable; *rdg.*., reading.

(2) Other abbreviations indicate sources of information from which better interpretations or readings may be obtained.

*Aq.* Aquila, a Greek translator of the Old Testament (perhaps about A.D. 130) characterized by great literalness.

*Aram.* Aramaic – may refer to the text in this language (used in parts of Ezra and Daniel), or to the meaning of an Aramaic word. Aramaic belongs to the same language family as Hebrew, and is known from about 1000 B.C. over a wide area of the Middle East, including Palestine.

*Heb.* Hebrew – may refer to the Hebrew text or may indicate the literal meaning of the Hebrew word.

*Josephus* Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37/8–about 100), author of the *Jewish Antiquities*, a survey of the whole history of his people, directed partly at least to a non-Jewish audience, and of various other works, notably one on the *Jewish War* (that of A.D. 66–73) and a defence of Judaism (*Against Apion*).

*Luc. Sept.* Lucian's recension of the Septuagint, an important edition made in Antioch in Syria about the end of the third century A.D.



## FOOTNOTES TO THE N.E.B. TEXT

- Pesh.* Peshitta or Peshitto, the Syriac version of the Old Testament. Syriac is the name given chiefly to a form of Eastern Aramaic used by the Christian community. The translation varies in quality, and is at many points influenced by Septuagint or the Targums.
- Sam.* Samaritan Pentateuch – the form of the first five books of the Old Testament as used by the Samaritan community. It is written in Hebrew in a special form of the Old Hebrew script, and preserves an important form of the text, somewhat influenced by Samaritan ideas.
- Scroll(s)* Scroll(s), commonly called the Dead Sea Scrolls, found at or near Qumran from 1947 onwards. These important manuscripts shed light on the state of the Hebrew text as it was developing in the last centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.
- Sept.* Septuagint (meaning ‘seventy’; often abbreviated as the Roman numeral LXX), the name given to the main Greek version of the Old Testament. According to tradition, the Pentateuch was translated in Egypt in the third century B.C. by 70 (or 72) translators, six from each tribe, but the precise nature of its origin and development is not fully known. It was intended to provide Greek-speaking Jews with a convenient translation. Subsequently it came to be much revered by the Christian community.
- Symm.* Symmachus, another Greek translator of the Old Testament (beginning of the third century A.D.), who tried to combine literalness with good style. Both Lucian and Jerome viewed his version with favour.
- Targ.* Targum, a name given to various Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, produced over a long period and eventually standardized, for the use of Aramaic-speaking Jews.
- Theod.* Theodotion, the author of a revision of the Septuagint (probably second century A.D.), very dependent on the Hebrew text.
- Vulg.* Vulgate, the most important Latin version of the Old Testament, produced by Jerome about A.D. 400, and the text most used throughout the Middle Ages in western Christianity.
- [ . . . ] In the text itself square brackets are used to indicate probably late additions to the Hebrew text.
- (Fuller discussion of a number of these points may be found in *The Making of the Old Testament* in this series)

# EXODUS

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE NATURE AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

The title 'Exodus' derives from the Latin *Liber Exodi* which is itself inherited from the title given to the second book of the Old Testament in the earlier Greek translation. The Greek *exodus* means 'departure' and refers to the major event described by the book, which is the departure of a group of Hebrew slaves from Egypt. The original Hebrew text follows the custom of describing a book by its opening words, in this case 'These are the names', or simply 'Names' (Heb. *shemoth*). Although the departure from Egypt is the major event of the book, its contents range more widely beyond this. Other important events are described, the chief of which is an appearance of God on Mount Sinai and the conclusion of a covenant between him and the fugitive Hebrews from Egypt. In connection with this covenant certain law codes were given to Israel by the hand of Moses, and these are set out in detail. Alongside these law codes extensive instructions are added for the pattern and forms of worship which Israel is to adopt in consequence of its covenant relationship to God. Foremost among these are instructions for the making of an Ark, or chest, which is to be used as a permanent witness to God's presence, and a Tabernacle or tent in which this Ark is to be kept. The narrative describes how these instructions were carried out, and how a visible sign of the divine presence appeared in the form of a cloud which remained over the tent. The book of Exodus comes to an end on this high note of religious symbolism and experience, with the people of Israel setting out from the region of Sinai to continue their journey through the desert to the land promised to their ancestors.

It will be seen from this outline that the book is primarily



a narrative, but that the continuity of the story is interrupted by the introduction of codes of law and instructions for the setting up of an authorized sanctuary and priesthood. It is these sections of law which have led to the traditional classification of Exodus as the second of the five books of law, with which the Bible begins, and which are called the Pentateuch (= Five Books).

Although the separation of Exodus as an independent book dates back to early Jewish tradition, and has been carried over into the Christian Bible, this is largely a matter of convenience. Both in the sources from which the book has been compiled, and in its subject-matter, Exodus is a part of the continuous story of the origins of Israel which extends from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Thus Exodus is the second chapter of this comprehensive work, rather than an independent book in its own right.

#### WHO WROTE THE BOOK?

The traditional Jewish view is that Exodus, like the other four books of the Pentateuch, was written by Moses. This, however, is not so much a statement of authorship as a religious affirmation that the book derives its authority from the work of Moses. For a careful answer to the question of the identity of the actual author, or authors, we have to look at the evidence which the book itself provides, since we have no external sources of information on this matter.

Close scrutiny reveals that the book is a composite work, and was not written by one man, but by many. Although we cannot possibly hope to know who precisely these authors were, we can at least try to answer the questions of when and why they wrote.

The Pentateuch as a whole is a composite work, and modern scholars have traced with reasonable confidence and clarity four major sources, which are usually known by the letters J, E, D and P. The reasons for choosing these letters can be explained when they are considered separately. Three of these

sources, J, E and P, are to be found extensively in Exodus, whereas the fourth, D, is not to be found there except in a secondary way where an editor of this school has made some additions and revisions. We can therefore reckon for practical purposes upon three major sources of the book of Exodus.

The oldest of these sources, J, is a court epic, which was most probably written in Solomon's reign in the tenth century B.C. It is called J because it favours the use of the divine name Jehovah and because it was written in Judah. This source contained an extensive account of the beginnings of Israel, focusing upon the divine promise to Abraham (Gen. 12: 1-3) that the land of Canaan would belong to his descendants, who would become a great nation and an example of blessing to other nations. It then narrated how this promise was fulfilled through events in spite of many setbacks, of which the greatest was the oppression in Egypt which forms the background to the exodus. By leading his people out of Egypt, and enabling them at last to conquer and settle in the land promised to Abraham, God could be seen to have fulfilled his word.

The next of the major sources of Exodus, E, is rather more difficult to define and date. It gains its name from its use of the more general title *Elohim* for God, and also because it has often been thought to derive from the northern part of Israel, centred on the hill country of Ephraim. It is far from certain how much of the source material which is ascribed to E comes from one single written document. Much of it appears as additions and variations to what has already been narrated in the J epic. Where more extensive sections are found they appear sometimes to have had an independent origin before being incorporated into E. This is certainly true of the two great law codes, the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20: 2-17) and the longer collection of laws in Exod. 20: 22 - 23: 19, which is called the Book of the Covenant from the reference in Exod. 24: 8, both of which are now preserved in E passages. Several scholars have questioned therefore whether there ever was a single E document of comparable range to that of J. Perhaps



the material has been more loosely connected and added to the earlier work. In any case it is later than the work of J.

The third of the major sources of Exodus, P, was composed after 587 B.C. when a section of the population of Judah had been exiled in Babylon, and when the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed. It reveals the plans and hopes for the reconstruction and renewal of Israel which were brought back to Judah by the Babylonian exiles. It exemplifies their expectation of a fuller and more permanent fulfilment of the ancient promises which had highlighted the early days of Israel's greatness, but which had come to nothing with the decline and political downfall of the kingdoms of Israel (721 B.C.) and Judah (587 B.C.).

If we picture the oldest epic history of Israel (J) as a kind of 'written constitution' of Israel as the people of God, then we can compare this post-exilic work to a redrafting of this in the light of all that had happened since the death of Solomon. It gives a later reflection upon the events and institutions which stood at the beginning of Israel's life, and its purpose is to bring out their fuller religious meaning. It seeks particularly to show that Israel was not just a nation, but a worshipping community of people, whose worship was rooted in the revelation of God that had taken place on Mount Sinai. Thus it is to this source that we owe the extensive instructions for the building and setting up of the Tabernacle contained in Exod. 25-30, 35-40. Because of its special concern with worship and its administration it is usually referred to as the Priestly Document, and given the abbreviation P.

The source D, which has influenced certain passages in Exodus, is called Deuteronomic, because it provides the kernel of the book of Deuteronomy. It is to be recognized as important to Exodus simply in certain editorial revisions and notes made to the earlier (J and E) sources at the time when these were combined with the book of Deuteronomy. Hence these passages are ascribed to R<sup>D</sup>, the Deuteronomic editor, or redactor. Each source in its own way not only adds some-



thing to the information about Israel's origins, but interprets these origins in the light of its own contemporary situation.

## THE TRADITION BEHIND THE SOURCES

The identification of these major sources which have been used in the composition of Exodus is only a part of the answer to the question, 'Who wrote the book?' We have already mentioned that although the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant appear in the context of the Elohist source they were already self-contained and independent compositions when this author incorporated them into his work. Thus the authors of the sources were not the first to tell the stories, or to compose the laws, which we find in them. Rather they collected them, and put them together into a connected story. Individual stories would already have been told by word of mouth for whole generations of Israelites, especially at the great religious festivals which marked the passing of the seasons in ancient Israel. Similarly laws, and the collection of these into legal handbooks, would have taken place among those circles who were responsible for maintaining justice in Israel. When we read in Exod. 12: 26 that Israelite children were encouraged to ask the question 'What is the meaning of this rite?' in connection with the feast of Passover, we learn that in reply the head of the household solemnly recounted the story of the deliverance of the ancestors of Israel from Egypt, and showed how the festival they were celebrating was a reminder of these events. By doing this the whole family was reminded of its obligations towards God, and of the great debt that the whole nation of Israel owed to him. In this way the festival served an educational end by conveying an awareness of the goodness and purpose of God. We may reasonably conclude, therefore, that even the earliest of the sources of Exodus was not a novel composition, but represented the writing down of a story that had already been told and retold for several generations.

The kernel of the story of the deliverance from Egypt would first have been put together and told as part of the celebration of the Passover among Israelite families in the spring of each year. In a sense the authors of the story were those men and women who had first experienced the exodus from Egypt, and who regarded it as so significant a manifestation of God's goodness that they sought year by year to remember it in connection with their celebration of Passover. Since we need not doubt the important part played by Moses in giving this escape from Egypt a religious interpretation, we can trace back the ancestry of our book of Exodus to him without supposing that he actually wrote any of it. At first the story was told orally in connection with the celebration of Passover. Subsequently it was written down and added to by the inclusion of narratives, law codes, and other relevant material which had a bearing on Israel's origins and national life.

The composition of the book of Exodus was therefore a very complex process which extended over a period of several centuries. This is what we should expect from a work which deals with such central events of Israel's origins, and which endeavoured to set out the basic laws and principles which governed its social and religious life. Experience and reflection upon the tradition necessitated a long process of addition and revision before our book of Exodus could assume its present form as the second chapter of the history of Israel's beginnings.

#### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

We have seen that Exodus sets out to be a narrative describing the origin of the people of Israel from the descendants of Jacob who had fled to Egypt, and who escaped from slavery there. This narrative has been used to provide a framework for a wide-ranging collection of material, drawn from different ages, of a moral, legal and religious nature. This has been introduced into the narrative because it was regarded as showing the essential nature of Israel, and therefore neces-



sary to any account of how Israel had come into existence. The story is told in such a way as to show that Israel is God's chosen people, and the various collections of laws and instructions indicate how Israel is to respond to this divine election. Even the earliest of the sources of the book of Exodus is approximately 300 years later than the events which it describes, and we must ask what authentic basis of history lies behind the tradition. Only the main outlines of the historical problem can be touched upon.

The book of Genesis concludes with the descendants of Jacob-Israel living comfortably in Egypt, and still no more in number than a large family group. With the beginning of the book of Exodus very many years have passed and this family has grown in number to become a large nation, who are now held as slaves in Egypt, and are compelled to work on state building projects. The description of these slaves as 'Hebrews' reflects Egyptian social conditions, where there existed a slave class of 'Apiru', with whom the 'Hebrews' are probably to be identified. Such a slave class of people appear in more than one country, and whilst they sometimes seem to have formed distinct racial groups, their common distinctive feature is their low social position and their unsettled way of life. They appear in Babylonian texts as *Habiru*. That these Israelite slaves helped to build the cities Pithom and Rameses (Exod. 1: 12) is inherently probable, and would identify the Pharaoh of the oppression as Rameses II (1290-1223 B.C.), who rebuilt these cities. Since this Pharaoh is said to have died by the time the exodus took place (Exod. 2: 23), it would appear that the Pharaoh of the exodus was his successor Merneptah (1223-1211 B.C.). This raises a difficulty, since a victory hymn, inscribed on a black stone tablet and dating from the fifth year of this Pharaoh's reign (i.e. about 1218 B.C.), records the victory of Egyptian forces over several Palestinian enemies, including Israel. This is the earliest mention of Israel outside the Bible, and presupposes that it has already settled in the land of Canaan. The first five years of

Merneptah's reign form far too short a period in which to locate the exodus, the wilderness wandering and the settlement of Israel in the land. Either the exodus took place earlier, in the reign of Rameses II, as some scholars argue, or more probably the Israel referred to on Merneptah's tablet is not to be identified with the Hebrews who escaped out of Egypt under Moses. In this case we must accept that when the Hebrews did subsequently enter Canaan they took over the name Israel from other semi-nomadic groups who were already settled there. In this way the name Israel came to be linked with the exodus tradition.

No direct evidence from outside the Old Testament exists for the actual departure of the Israelites from Egypt, although the general picture of such an escape is wholly probable and convincing from what is known of contemporary conditions. Evidence of similar escapes by half-nomad groups who had settled in Egypt in time of famine, and who had been forced into working for the Egyptian government, is found in a papyrus document (Papyrus Anastasi VI) from the reign of Pharaoh Seti II (about 1205 B.C.). The general framework of the events described in the book of Exodus thus raises no serious problem of historical credibility. Into this basic story, however, a great deal of detail has been woven which has a religious and didactic origin, rather than one embedded in any simple record of events. The account of the plagues upon Egypt is designed to show the supremacy of the Lord God of Israel over all the gods and magicians of Egypt, and the story of the first Passover celebration is intended to justify and interpret the continued observance of this feast in Israel. The book as a whole, therefore, presents us with history as seen through the eyes of faith. It is not a simple account of events as they happened, but a record of the faith and significance which succeeding generations of Israelites attached to the story of their own national origin. From being a national history it has become a sacred history, and throughout its length it points the reader not simply to what happened, but



to the greatness of God and the disclosure of his purpose which is to be learnt through the story of what happened. History and faith are inseparably woven together in the book. Nor is this interweaving the result of the faith of one man, or of one age, alone, but it represents the continuing faith of many generations of Israelites who persevered in reflecting upon the question: 'What does it mean for us to be the people of God?' The book of Exodus is not therefore simply a history book, but a truly religious work, arising out of the faith of those who had first seen the hand of God at work in their past, and intended to evoke a similar faith in the minds of the readers.

\* \* \* \* \*

## *Israel enslaved in Egypt*

The first eleven chapters of the book of Exodus concern the plight of Israel in Egypt, with its enforced slavery to assist in building the Egyptian cities of Pithom and Rameses. The cruelty of this slavery is brought out incidentally in the account of the birth and childhood escape of Moses, the divinely chosen deliverer of Israel. After being forced to flee from Egypt, Moses receives a call from God on Mount Sinai to lead the Israelites out of Egypt in order that they might worship God in the wilderness. As a proof of his divine authority God reveals to Moses his new name, the LORD, or Jehovah, and arms him with signs to perform before the Israelites in Egypt. On his return to Egypt these are immediately successful, but are followed by more fearful signs performed for the benefit of the Egyptians, who are unwilling to let their slave labourers go. These signs take the form of nine plagues which terrify the Egyptians, but do not procure the release of the Israelites, although finally even many Egyptians plead with their Pharaoh to rid them of the troublesome Israelites.



## THE OPPRESSION OF ISRAEL

1 **T**HESE ARE THE NAMES of the Israelites who entered  
 2 Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: Reuben,  
 3 Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin;  
 4, 5 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. There were seventy<sup>a</sup>  
 of them all told, all direct descendants of Jacob. Joseph  
 was already in Egypt.

6 In course of time Joseph died, he and all his brothers and  
 7 that whole generation. Now the Israelites were fruitful  
 and prolific; they increased in numbers and became very  
 powerful,<sup>b</sup> so that the country was overrun by them.  
 8 Then a new king ascended the throne of Egypt, one who  
 9 knew nothing of Joseph. He said to his people, 'These  
 Israelites have become too many and too strong for us.  
 10 We must take precautions to see that they do not increase  
 any further; or we shall find that, if war breaks out, they  
 will join the enemy and fight against us, and they will  
 11 become masters of the country.' So they were made to  
 work in gangs with officers set over them, to break their  
 spirit with heavy labour. This is how Pharaoh's store-  
 12 cities, Pithom and Rameses, were built. But the more  
 harshly they were treated, the more their numbers in-  
 creased beyond all bounds, until the Egyptians came to  
 13 loathe the sight of them. So they treated their Israelite  
 14 slaves with ruthless severity, and made life bitter for them  
 with cruel servitude, setting them to work on clay and  
 brick-making, and all sorts of work in the fields. In short  
 they made ruthless use of them as slaves in every kind of  
 hard labour.

[a] Or, with Scroll and Sept. (cp. Acts 7: 14), seventy-five.

[b] Or numerous.

★ With the beginning of the book of Exodus a significant change is brought into the story of Israel from the family history of the patriarchs which had preceded it. Those who entered Egypt with Jacob were no more than a large family group of seventy persons, but in the course of the period spent there they grew into a nation. Thus Exodus begins with this people, now a considerable national group, appearing as slaves who were compelled to work on the extensive building projects sponsored by the Egyptian Pharaoh. This action is interpreted as a repressive measure introduced by the Egyptians for fear of the potential political threat of such a large group of alien people settled in the country. The narrative is from the J and P sources.

1. *the Israelites*: literally 'the sons of Israel', which is here at first intended literally for the descendants of Jacob-Israel, but is afterwards used more broadly for the Israelite people, as in verse 7.

5. *There were seventy of them*: the number seventy is supported by Deut. 10: 22 and the list in Gen. 46: 8-27, if Dinah is excluded. By including the three grandsons and two great-grandsons of Joseph, the Greek (Septuagint) translation made the total up to seventy-five (cp. also the Greek of Gen. 46: 27), which explains the variant reading here.

8. *a new king*: the change in the circumstances of the Israelites is attributed to a change in royal dynasty. If the Israelites settled in Egypt during the reign of the Hyksos kings (1720-1570 B.C.), this could indicate the ending of the Hyksos rule and the accession of Ah-mose I (1570-1546 B.C.). However, since the exodus did not take place until the thirteenth century B.C., it is more likely that a later Pharaoh is referred to, either the vigorous Seti I, the founder of the nineteenth dynasty, or more probably the actual Pharaoh of the oppression, Rameses II (1290-1223 B.C.).

10. *We must take precautions*: the assignment of the Israelites to forced labour gangs is interpreted as a precautionary measure against their becoming too powerful. However, the



organization of the Egyptian state was markedly feudalistic, and virtually all the work of the state was done by a huge number of citizens who lived in near slavery. These people were of Egyptian as well as alien origin, although foreign immigrants were particularly liable to conscription into such state labour gangs. The narrative reflects the Israelite feeling of having been singled out for repressive treatment, but in its essentials it presents an authentic picture of the government employment of slave labour in Egypt.

II. *Pharaoh's store-cities, Pithom and Rameses*: the Egyptian king is consistently referred to as Pharaoh, which is not a name but a deferential title (Egyptian *Per-'o* = 'great house'). This was originally used literally of the royal palace area, but was later applied to the king who dwelt there, since it was thought to be unfitting to speak directly of so exalted a person. The names of the store-cities Pithom and Rameses identify the Pharaoh of the oppression as Rameses II, who was responsible for building them. Both cities were in the eastern delta area, and Rameses served as a royal residence. Pithom is identified either with Tell el-Mashkuta or Tell er-Retabeh and Rameses with Avaris-Tanis. \*

#### THE BIRTH OF MOSES

- 15 Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives,  
 16 whose names were Shiphrah and Puah. 'When you are attending the Hebrew women in childbirth,' he told them, 'watch as the child is delivered<sup>a</sup> and if it is a boy, kill him; 17 if it is a girl, let her live.' But they were God-fearing women. They did not do what the king of Egypt had told 18 them to do, but let the boys live. So he summoned those Hebrew midwives and asked them why they had done 19 this and let the boys live. They told Pharaoh that Hebrew women were not like Egyptian women. When they were

[a] as...delivered: *lit.* on the birth-stool.

in labour they gave birth before the midwife could get to them. So God made the midwives prosper, and the people <sup>20</sup> increased in numbers and in strength. God gave the mid- <sup>21</sup> wives homes and families of their own, because they feared him. Pharaoh then ordered all his people to throw <sup>22</sup> every new-born Hebrew<sup>a</sup> boy into the Nile, but to let the girls live.

A descendant of Levi married a Levite woman who <sup>21,2</sup> conceived and bore a son. When she saw what a fine child he was, she hid him for three months, but she could con- <sup>3</sup> ceal him no longer. So she got a rush basket for him, made it watertight with clay and tar, laid him in it, and put it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. The child's sister <sup>4</sup> took her stand at a distance to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, <sup>5</sup> while her ladies-in-waiting walked along the bank. She noticed the basket among the reeds and sent her slave-girl for it. She took it from her and when she opened it, she <sup>6</sup> saw the child. It was crying, and she was filled with pity for it. 'Why,' she said, 'it is a little Hebrew boy.' There- <sup>7</sup> upon the sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and fetch one of the Hebrew women as a wet-nurse to suckle the child for you?' Pharaoh's daughter told her to go; so <sup>8</sup> the girl went and called the baby's mother. Then Pharaoh's <sup>9</sup> daughter said to her, 'Here is the child, suckle him for me, and I will pay you for it myself.' So the woman took the child and suckled him. When the child was old enough, <sup>10</sup> she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him and called him Moses,<sup>b</sup> 'because', she said, 'I drew<sup>c</sup> him out of the water.'

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. om.* [b] *Heb. Mosheh.* [c] *Heb. verb mashah.*



\* The general condition of oppression into which the Israelites had been reduced provides the setting for the story of the birth and adoption of an Israelite child into the Egyptian royal court. Thus Moses is saved from death in infancy, and given a privileged education and upbringing in the Egyptian royal court. With providential irony the very circumstances of the oppression make possible the appearance of a deliverer. The story of Moses' remarkable childhood escape has several similarities to the ancient Babylonian legend of Sargon of Accad of the third millennium B.C. This told that when Sargon was born, his mother set him in a little basket made of reeds and covered with pitch, and launched him into the river Euphrates. From there he was rescued by a peasant until the goddess Ishtar took care of him. The present account is from the E source.

15. *Hebrew midwives*: the description of the Israelite ancestors in Egypt as Hebrews refers to their social status, rather than to their racial origin. Many documents from Egypt and elsewhere in the Near East refer to communities of Hebrews (Babylonian *Habiru*; Egyptian *'Apiru*). The title is of uncertain meaning, and whilst it sometimes seems to refer to particular racial groups it more often indicates a class of people of low social status. They stood somewhere between the slaves and free citizens, and sometimes appear to be immigrants. Thus they were a class of people found in many lands in the ancient Near East, and the Israelites in Egypt were simply one group of them.

15. *Shiphrah and Puah*: the names mean 'Beauty' and 'Splendour', and are introduced here as typical for Israelite women.

2: 1. *A descendant of Levi*: Moses' parents are not named here, but the tradition of Exod. 6: 20 and Num. 26: 59 from the P source gives their names as Amram and Jochebed. The Levite origin of Moses was important for the priestly duties which he was to perform, since the Levites later formed the priestly class of Israel. The Old Testament presents them as



a tribe which scattered, and which was then given the special privilege of providing the priests of Israel (cp. Gen. 34; Deut. 33: 8-11).

4. *The child's sister*: the sister is not named here, but she plays an important part later, when she is given the name Miriam (Exod. 15: 20; Num. 26: 59).

10. *and called him Moses*: the name is given a popular explanation on the basis of its similarity of sound to the Hebrew verb *māshāh*, meaning 'to draw'. The name, however, is certainly of Egyptian origin, deriving from the Egyptian word for 'son', which is found in many well-known Egyptian names such as Ah-mose and Rameses. Perhaps originally the name of Moses also had a longer (compound) form. \*

#### THE FLIGHT OF MOSES FROM EGYPT

One day when Moses was grown up, he went out to his 11  
own kinsmen and saw them at their heavy labour. He  
saw an Egyptian strike one of his fellow-Hebrews. He 12  
looked this way and that, and, seeing there was no one  
about, he struck the Egyptian down and hid his body in  
the sand. When he went out next day, two Hebrews were 13  
fighting together. He asked the man who was in the  
wrong, 'Why are you striking him?' 'Who set you up as 14  
an officer and judge over us?' the man replied. 'Do you  
mean to murder me as you murdered the Egyptian?'  
Moses was alarmed. 'The thing must have become  
known', he said to himself. When Pharaoh heard of it, he 15  
tried to put Moses to death, but Moses made good his  
escape and settled in the land of Midian.

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. One 16  
day as Moses sat by a well, they came to draw water and  
filled the troughs to water their father's sheep. Some 17

shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses got up,  
18 took the girls' part and watered their sheep himself. When  
the girls came back to their father Reuel, he asked, 'How  
19 is it that you are back so quickly today?' 'An Egyptian  
rescued us from the shepherds,' they answered; 'and he  
20 even drew the water for us and watered the sheep.' 'But  
where is he then?' he said to his daughters. 'Why did you  
21 leave him behind? Go and invite him to eat with us.' So  
it came about that Moses agreed to live with the man, and  
22 he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She  
bore him a son, and Moses called him Gershom, 'because',  
he said, 'I have become an alien<sup>a</sup> living in a foreign  
land.'

\* A considerable interval of time, said in Acts 7: 23 to have been about 40 years, now elapses, during which Moses grows up to manhood. Nothing is said in the Old Testament about the intervening years, although Acts 7: 22 reflects the later Jewish tradition that Moses was 'trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians'. Moses is spared the rigours of the slavery endured by his fellow countrymen, although he has become aware that he really belongs to them. In seeking to protect a fellow Hebrew from assault by an Egyptian, Moses himself kills the offender, and is forced to flee when he learns that this action has become public knowledge. Thus he escaped into the desert, as no doubt many other fugitives from Egypt had done, and came into the region inhabited by the Midianite people, a nomadic community of sheep-farmers. With no hope of returning to Egypt, Moses marries into the Midianite people, becoming the son-in-law of the priest of Midian. The stage is now set for the decisive encounter between Moses and God. The entire narrative is from the J source.

[a] *Heb. ger.*



11. *He saw an Egyptian strike*: the verb indicates violent assault, and is used in the next verse to describe the killing of the Egyptian by Moses.

14. *Who set you up?*: the Hebrews do not recognize Moses as one of themselves, even though he had already acted in their interests.

15. *made good his escape*: thereby escaping certain death, a deliverance which is regarded as providential.

16. *Now the priest of Midian*: verse 18 gives his name as Reuel.

18. *their father Reuel*: in Exod. 3: 1; 4: 18 and ch. 18 the name of Moses' father-in-law is 'Jethro, priest of Midian', and Reuel is very likely a clan name. See also Num. 10: 29 and Judg. 4: 11 for reference to 'Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite', as Moses' brother-in-law.

22. *Moses called him Gershom*: in typical folk-narrative style the name is given a popular explanation in terms of Moses' situation. The name is taken to mean 'alien there', although this is not its true etymology. Gershom appears as the head of a family of priests living at Dan in the land of Canaan (Judg. 18: 30), and is the only son of Moses mentioned. \*

#### THE REVELATION OF GOD TO MOSES

Years passed, and the king of Egypt died, but the Israelites <sup>23</sup> still groaned in slavery. They cried out, and their appeal for rescue from their slavery rose up to God. He heard <sup>24</sup> their groaning, and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he saw the plight of Israel, <sup>25</sup> and he took heed of it.

Moses was minding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, <sup>3</sup> priest of Midian. He led the flock along the side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.



- 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in the flame of a burning bush. Moses noticed that, although the bush  
 3 was on fire, it was not being burnt up; so he said to himself, 'I must go across to see this wonderful sight. Why  
 4 does not the bush burn away?' When the LORD saw that Moses had turned aside to look, he<sup>a</sup> called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses.' And Moses answered, 'Yes,  
 5 I am here.' God said, 'Come no nearer; take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.'  
 6 Then he said, 'I am the God of your forefathers,<sup>b</sup> the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to gaze on God.
- 7 The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry against their  
 8 slave-masters. I have taken heed of their sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them up out of that country into a fine, broad land; it is a land flowing with milk and honey, the home of Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites,  
 9 and Jebusites. The outcry of the Israelites has now reached me; yes, I have seen the brutality of the Egyptians towards them. Come now; I will send you to Pharaoh and  
 10 you shall bring my people Israel out of Egypt.' 'But who am I,' Moses said to God, 'that I should go to Pharaoh,  
 11 and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' God<sup>c</sup> answered, 'I am<sup>d</sup> with you. This shall be the proof that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall all worship God here on this mountain.'

[a] *Heb.* God.[b] *So Sam.; Heb.* father.[c] *So Sept.; Heb.* om.[d] *Or I will be; Heb.* ehych.

\* After a brief narrative connection in 2: 23–5, which recalls the wider background of Israel's continued slavery in Egypt, and which comes from the P source, we learn of the decisive revelation to Moses of the LORD God, announcing the plan to rescue the Israelites from their plight. This narrative comes from E, and prepares for the disclosure of the new name, the LORD, by which God is henceforth to be known. The encounter takes place on Mount Horeb, the name used by the E source for the mountain which is otherwise called Sinai (J and P sources). This mountain lies in the wilderness in territory used by the Midianites, and the sign of God's presence there is the appearance of a bush, which burns without being burnt up. The mountain is thereby shown to be 'holy ground', and this is more fully explained when the God of the mountain speaks and identifies himself as none other than the God worshipped by the ancestors of the oppressed Israelites. The dramatic new revelation of God takes the form of an announcement of the forthcoming rescue of the Israelites from Egypt, and a re-affirmation of the promise to give to them the land of the Canaanites which had been made to their ancestors (with Abraham Gen. 12: 1 ff.; with Isaac Gen. 26: 24; with Jacob Gen. 48: 15–16).

3: 1. *and came to Horeb*: etymologically the name seems to signify 'desolate place', indicating its remote and arid setting. It is certainly to be identified with Mount Sinai, the name for the mountain favoured by the J and P sources (Exod. 16: 1 etc.). Its location is not precisely known, although since early Christian times it has been identified with the *Jebel Musa* (Mountain of Moses) in the south of the Sinai peninsula, which was undoubtedly a very ancient holy place. In recent times a number of scholars have sought to locate it much further east in north-west Arabia, in the conviction that it was originally a volcano. This supposition is unnecessary, however, and such a distant location is improbable. More plausibly, some recent contenders have argued that it lay in the more northern part of the Sinai peninsula, closer to Kadesh and the



Egyptian border. Neither of these views, however, is sufficiently well supported to displace the traditional identification with the *Jebel Musa*.

*the mountain of God*: in ancient times this title conveyed the notion that the god was thought to dwell upon the mountain, whose peak reached into heaven. It was an ancient divine abode, although this fact is now revealed to Moses for the first time.

2. *the angel of the LORD*: we should not think of a specific angelic being who uniquely bore this title. Rather the sequel shows that it is actually the LORD himself who appears, and this title has been introduced to avoid the suggestion of a direct physical appearance of the deity. Instead God discloses himself indirectly, through the person of a messenger.

*the flame of a burning bush*: the Hebrew word for bush (*seneh*) has a close similarity of sound to the name Sinai, and the author no doubt consciously intends a play on this. Thus in Deut. 33: 16 God can be called 'him who dwells in the burning bush'. Various explanations have been put forward to account for the bush burning without being burnt up, in terms of plants exuding an inflammable gas. Without discounting such suggestions altogether, we must note that the importance of the fire here is as a sign of the presence of God.

5. *take off your sandals*: the place is holy ground because of God's presence there, and this entails physical danger to undiscerning intruders. It must only be trodden in bare feet (i.e. without a man-made covering). This regards holiness as a partly physical quality, and for Muslims the removal of sandals is still a customary sign of reverence when entering a mosque.

6. *I am the God of your forefathers*: the exact name used by Israel's ancestors for their God is not certainly recoverable. 'God of my father' has been suggested; such titles as God (or Shield) of Abraham (cp. Gen. 15: 1; N.E.B. note), Fear of Isaac (cp. Gen. 31: 42) and Strong One of Jacob (cp. Gen. 49: 24) appear. The P source consistently uses the name God Almighty (Gen. 17: 1) for the age from Abraham to Moses

(cp. Exod. 6: 2-3). The emphasis of the statement here is upon the identity of the God who now reveals himself to Moses by a new name with the God who had always been worshipped by Israel's ancestors. The new name did not imply a new God.

*Moses covered his face*: he wrapped it in his cloak, since he was familiar with the ancient tradition that no man could see the face of God and live (cp. Exod. 33: 20; Judg. 13: 22).

8. *the home of Canaanites*: the names of the previous inhabitants of Canaan appear several times in the Old Testament, usually as a list of six or seven peoples (cp. verse 17, and see also Gen. 15: 19-21 where the increase of the names to ten is unique). The peoples referred to were clans, or local communities, of varied racial origin. The *Canaanites* occupied the eastern Mediterranean coastland and derived their name from the purple dye which was produced there and used for making an expensive cloth. Their culture influenced the whole region from Phoenicia to Egypt. The *Hittites* established a great empire centred upon a kingdom in what is now Turkey, which flourished in the second half of the second millennium B.C. The Hittites to which the Old Testament refers seem only distantly related to this empire through settlements of such Hittite peoples in Syria. The *Amorites* were a West Semitic people who had migrated from Mesopotamia, where they appear in a number of ancient texts as 'Amurru'. *Perizzites* appears to mean 'villagers', indicating an indigenous population living outside the cities which formed the main centres of Canaanite life. The *Jebusites* formed the local, pre-Israelite, population of Jerusalem (cp. 2 Sam. 5: 6-10); the *Hivites* were settled in Gibeon.

12. *I am with you*: there is already a play here upon the meaning of the divine name which is yet to be disclosed; cp. footnote [d] and see comment on verse 14. God will be with Moses, and he will choose his own way of demonstrating that Moses is acting under a divine commission. \*



## THE REVELATION OF THE DIVINE NAME

- 13 Then Moses said to God, 'If I go to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their forefathers has sent me to  
 14 them, and they ask me his name, what shall I say?' God answered, 'I AM; that is who I am.<sup>a</sup> Tell them that I AM  
 15 has sent you to them.' And God said further, 'You must tell the Israelites this, that it is JEHOVAH<sup>b</sup> the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who has sent you to them. This is my name  
 16 for ever; this is my title in every generation. Go and assemble the elders of Israel and tell them that JEHOVAH the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to you and has said, "I have indeed turned my eyes towards you; I have marked all that has  
 17 been done to you in Egypt, and I am resolved to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt, into the country of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and  
 18 Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey." They will listen to you, and then you and the elders of Israel must go to the king of Egypt. Tell him, "It has happened that the LORD the God of the Hebrews met us. So now give us leave to go a three days' journey into the wilderness to  
 19 offer sacrifice to the LORD our God." I know well that the king of Egypt will not give you leave unless he is com-  
 20 pelled. I shall then stretch out my hand and assail the Egyptians with all the miracles I shall work among them.  
 21 After that he will send you away. Further, I will bring this people into such favour with the Egyptians that, when

[a] I AM. . . I am: or I will be what I will be.

[b] The Hebrew consonants are YHWH, probably pronounced Yahweh, but traditionally read Jehovah.

you go, you will not go empty-handed. Every woman<sup>22</sup> shall ask her neighbour or any woman who lives in her house for jewellery of silver and gold and for clothing. Load your sons and daughters with them, and plunder Egypt.'

\* The high-point of the revelation of God to Moses now occurs in the disclosure of the divine name, the LORD, or Yahweh. In ancient times a very special sanctity attached to the name of a deity, since by it his help was invoked. Thus knowledge of the name of God marked the enjoyment of a very privileged relationship to him (cp. Isa. 45: 3-4). The revelation to Moses of the divine name, which is apparently new to him, is to serve as his authentication before his fellow Israelites. It is followed, therefore, by a more detailed description of the commission to return to Egypt. Together with verses 1-12 of ch. 3 this account comes from the E source.

14. *I AM; that is who I am*: God here introduces his name to Moses, first of all by giving an interpretation of it, and then by declaring it openly. In the Hebrew the name was originally written without vowels, as YHWH, and was most probably pronounced Yahweh. This could be interpreted as a verb meaning 'He causes to be', although it is very questionable whether this was the real etymology of the name. Most probably the author of the account did not know its real origin, and simply used its similarity in sound and appearance to the Hebrew verb 'to be' as a point to be explained. This he does by allowing God to introduce himself as the great 'I AM', the self-existent One. Since the Hebrew verb could be taken as either a present or future tense, the divine self-designation contains a strong overtone of future action. God acts in sovereign freedom, and makes himself known in whatever way he chooses. He exists, and the fact of his existence is demonstrated by his actions which become evident to men in the conduct of their affairs.



15. *JEHOVAH the God of their forefathers*: JEHOVAH is a hybrid form of the divine name which was produced by combining the four consonants YHWH with the vowels of the noun 'adōnai, meaning Lord. From late Old Testament times the Jews refrained from expressing publicly the sacred divine name, and instead substituted the word for 'Lord', which was adopted by the Greek and most subsequent translations. In English Bibles it is printed in capitals when it stands for Jehovah. This name only came into common use in Israel from the Mosaic age, and was most likely traditionally associated with the God of Mount Sinai (cp. comment on verse 3). The J source of the Pentateuch introduces the use of the name much earlier (Gen. 4: 26), but this anachronism has arisen from the author's conviction that the God of Moses is identical with the God of Israel's ancestors (cp. verse 6).

17. *a land flowing with milk and honey*: this description of the land of Canaan appears several times in the Old Testament (cp. Exod. 13: 5; 33: 3 etc.). The land is not in fact unusually fertile, but appeared so in contrast with the arid, half-desert regions where the sheep-rearing Israelites had been accustomed to seek their pastures.

18. *a three days' journey*: a journey of such a short duration would imply that Mount Sinai was situated close to the Egyptian border, and certainly not as far as the traditional *Jebel Musa*. The phrase, however, may only have been intended very loosely here.

19. *I know well*: these verses prepare for the sequel to this revelation of God by referring to Pharaoh's obstinacy and to the assurance that the Hebrews will ultimately be released. The reference to the spoiling of the Egyptians shows how the tables are to be turned, and how the Egyptians will be glad to pay the Hebrews for the work they have compelled them to do and as an encouragement to go. \*

## THE SIGNS OF MOSES' AUTHORITY

Moses answered, 'But they will never believe me or listen 4  
to me; they will say, "The LORD did not appear to you."' The LORD said, 'What have you there in your hand?' 'A 2  
staff', Moses answered. The LORD said, 'Throw it on the 3  
ground.' Moses threw it down and it turned into a snake.  
He ran away from it, but the LORD said, 'Put your hand 4  
out and seize it by the tail.' He did so and gripped it firmly,  
and it turned back into a staff in his hand. 'This is to con- 5  
vince the people that the LORD the God of their fore-  
fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God  
of Jacob, has appeared to you.' Then the LORD said, 'Put 6  
your hand inside the fold of your cloak.' He did so, and  
when he drew it out the skin was diseased, white as snow.  
The LORD said, 'Put it back again', and he did so. When 7  
he drew it out this time it was as healthy as the rest of his  
body. 'Now,' said the LORD, 'if they do not believe you 8  
and do not accept the evidence of the first sign, they may  
accept the evidence of the second. But if they are not con- 9  
vinced even by these two signs, and will not accept what  
you say, then fetch some water from the Nile and pour  
it out on the dry ground, and the water you take from  
the Nile will turn to blood on the ground.'

But Moses said, 'O LORD, I have never been a man of 10  
ready speech, never in my life, not even now that thou  
hast spoken to me; I am slow and hesitant of speech.' The 11  
LORD said to him, 'Who is it that gives man speech? Who  
makes him dumb or deaf? Who makes him clear-sighted  
or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Go now; I will help your 12  
speech and tell you what to say.' But Moses still protested, 13



- 14 'No, Lord, send whom thou wilt.' At this the LORD grew angry with Moses and said, 'Have you not a brother, Aaron the Levite? He, I know, will do all the speaking. He is already on his way out to meet you, and he will be
- 15 glad indeed to see you. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; I will help both of you to speak
- 16 and tell you both what to do. He will do all the speaking to the people for you, he will be the mouth-piece, and
- 17 you will be the god he speaks for. But take this staff, for with it you are to work the signs.'
- 18 At length Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said, 'Let me return to my kinsfolk in Egypt and see if they are still alive.' Jethro told him to go and wished him well.

\* The question is now raised of the reaction of the Israelites to Moses' claim that God has sent him. The communication of the new name for God will not be enough. Moses is therefore empowered to perform three powerful signs before the Israelites: turning a staff into a snake; making healthy skin leprous; and turning the Nile into blood. Thus we learn for the first time that God's work of delivering Israel from the oppression of Egypt will be performed 'with signs and wonders', which becomes a recurrent theme in Israel's recollection of the event (Deut. 4: 34; 6: 22 etc.).

Even when he has been commissioned to perform these signs Moses still remains unconvinced that he will be able to persuade the Israelites to listen to him. In anger, therefore, God introduces Aaron, Moses' brother, who is to act as spokesman for Moses. Nothing is said about Aaron's previous whereabouts, although he is assumed to be in Egypt (verse 14). The narrative comes basically from J, with verses 17-18 from E.

4: 1. *But they will never believe me:* an ordinary messenger

would usually have been provided with some document or sign to confirm his authority to speak for the one who had sent him. Moses, as God's messenger, was now confirmed as such by being given three signs to perform. In significant contrast, when Jesus was asked for a sign to confirm his authority, he refused to give one of this nature (Mark 8: 12).

2. *What have you there in your hand?*: for the turning of the staff into a snake compare Exod. 7: 9-12, which comes from the P source. There it is the unbelieving Pharaoh who is to be convinced, whereas here it is the Israelites. The act is a supernatural demonstration of divine power, although underlying it there is the motif of inducing a snake into a state of hypnotic rigidity.

6. *the skin was diseased*: there is no obvious physical explanation for the change.

9. *fetch some water from the Nile*: at certain seasons of the year the waters of the Nile bring down a large quantity of reddish-brown soil deposit, and undoubtedly it is this fact which lies behind the belief that the Nile waters could be turned into blood. Cp. Exod. 7: 17-25, where the sign is performed before Pharaoh and his magicians.

14. *Have you not a brother?*: Moses' further prevarication leads to the unexpected introduction of Aaron, his brother, who is to act as his spokesman. Nothing has been said earlier about Moses having a brother, who has apparently remained in Egypt. In later Israel the descendants of Aaron came to enjoy exclusive rights of priestly ministry (Exod. 28: 1 ff.; Lev. 8: 1 ff.). It is noteworthy therefore that in the subsequent events Aaron plays very little part, and that it is the P source which is careful to affirm Aaron's presence.

16. *and you will be the god*: the relationship of Aaron to Moses is compared to that between a prophet and God. Just as the prophet is the messenger of God, passing on the words which God has given him, so Aaron is to communicate the message which Moses gives to him. Thus the task of a prophet is clearly shown to be that of a messenger, who does not invent



his message but simply passes it on. It is noteworthy that the staff by which Moses is to work the signs which authenticate his message is still left in his possession. \*

## THE RETURN OF MOSES TO EGYPT

- 19 The LORD spoke to Moses in Midian and said to him, 'Go back to Egypt, for all those who wished to kill you are  
20 dead.' So Moses took his wife and children,<sup>a</sup> mounted them on an ass and set out for Egypt with the staff of God  
21 in his hand. The LORD said to Moses, 'While you are on your way back to Egypt, keep in mind all the portents I have given you power to show. You shall display these before Pharaoh, but I will make him obstinate and he will  
22 not let the people go. Then tell Pharaoh that these are the words of the LORD: "Israel is my first-born son. I have  
23 told you to let my son go, so that he may worship me. You have refused to let him go, so I will kill your first-born son."'
- 24 During the journey, while they were encamped for the night, the LORD met Moses, meaning to kill him, but  
25 Zipporah picked up a sharp flint, cut off her son's foreskin, and touched him<sup>b</sup> with it, saying, 'You are my blood-  
26 bridegroom.' So the LORD let Moses alone. Then she said,<sup>c</sup> 'Blood-bridegroom by circumcision.'
- 27 Meanwhile the LORD had ordered Aaron to go and meet Moses in the wilderness. Aaron went and met him at  
28 the mountain of God, and he kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything, the words the LORD had sent him to say  
29 and the signs he had commanded him to perform. Moses

[a] Or, possibly, son (cp. 2: 22; 4: 25).

[b] Lit. his feet.

[c] Or Therefore women say.

and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of Israel. Aaron told them everything that the LORD had said to <sup>30</sup> Moses; he performed the signs before the people, and they <sup>31</sup> were convinced. They heard that the LORD had shown his concern for the Israelites and seen their misery; and they bowed themselves to the ground in worship.

\* This section narrates the obedient response of Moses to God's commission, and describes his preparations for the journey back to Egypt. In a final admonition God tells him to keep in mind all the signs with which he has been empowered. Then, in declaring what Moses is to say to Pharaoh, God intimates that the last and greatest of his signs will be the killing of Pharaoh's first-born child (verse 23). To the account of Moses' return to Egypt is added a strange and unexpected story of the circumcision of his son, which was performed by Zipporah in order to ward off an attack upon the life of Moses by no less a person than God. The placing of this account here is unusual, since it might have been expected to relate either to Moses' marriage, or to the birth of his first child. The account is from J and E.

19. *for all those who wished to kill you*: neither here, nor in 2: 23, is any precise period of time mentioned that had elapsed whilst Moses was in the land of Midian. Acts 7: 30 describes it as forty years, but this was no doubt a rough figure for a generation.

20. *So Moses took his wife and children*: the mention of children is unexpected, since we have only been told of the birth of Moses' son Gershom (2: 22), and 4: 25 suggests that only one son was with Moses on his journey. Hence several scholars prefer to read the singular here, which requires only a very minor textual change. Cp. note [a]. Exod. 18: 5 represents a variant tradition which presupposes that Moses went alone to Egypt, and was joined by his wife and sons afterwards.

*mounted them on an ass*: the ass provided the normal mode of



transport at this time, even for the nomadic peoples living in the wilderness. The camel was already domesticated, but probably not yet in widespread use.

21. *keep in mind all the portents*: a portent was an unusual event which required a meaningful explanation, usually in terms of the presence and activity of God. The reference is not to the signs of verses 2-9, which were intended to convince the Israelites, but to the plagues which were to be demonstrations of divine power performed before Pharaoh by means of the rod. They were not primarily intended to punish the Egyptians, but to show them the power of the LORD in such a way that they would recognize his superiority over all other gods. In this way the Egyptians would come to see that the release of the Hebrews was the will of God.

*I will make him obstinate*: Pharaoh's initial refusal to permit the Israelites to fulfil the command of their God is itself presented as a mysterious action of the divine will. Thus the sovereignty of God even over those who were openly hostile to him is fully asserted, although there is no attempt to rationalize this insight, or to reconcile it with the understanding of God's goodness. In its present narrative setting the obstinacy of Pharaoh adds a strong note of tension, since the reader knows that Pharaoh can have no ultimate power to thwart the purposes of God. Even the actions by which he tries to prevent the release of the Israelites inevitably lead up to the final demonstration of God's power, after which he will be able to hold back the Israelites no longer.

22. *Israel is my first-born son*: the use of the metaphor of sonship to describe the warmth and closeness of Israel's relationship to God becomes one of the strongest analogies for the covenant between God and Israel. Cp. Hos. 11: 1:

‘When Israel was a boy, I loved him;  
I called my son out of Egypt.’

It expresses very vividly the intensity of divine love which holds Israel to God. In the ancient world the idea of sonship

to the deity was frequently used to describe a special relationship to God. Cp. Num. 21: 29 where the Moabites are described as 'people of Kemosh'.

23. *so I will kill your first-born son*: because Israel is God's son, Pharaoh's refusal to allow the Israelites to go free is to be punished by the death of Pharaoh's first-born son. This threat looks ahead to the last of the series of ten plagues by which God is to compel Pharaoh to obey him.

24. *the LORD met Moses*: this brief incident of a divine attack upon Moses is introduced without explanation of its cause, and the intention of God to kill Moses is wholly out of keeping with the context. It cannot be reduced simply to the supposition that Moses fell ill. Moses was attacked by an evil power of the desert, which the narrator has identified with the LORD God, since he regarded all divine powers as related to him. The implied reason for the attack is Moses' neglect of circumcision, apparently on himself, but possibly also on his son.

25. *Zipporah picked up a sharp flint*: the use of flint knives for circumcision reflects the antiquity of the practice, originating before the introduction of metal tools and weapons. Natural conservatism preserved the use of the ancient implement for performing the ancient rite (cp. Josh. 5: 2, 3). Here it perhaps indicates that Moses is being 'initiated' into God's service by this symbolic rite of initiation, before the act of divine deliverance can take place.

*and touched him with it*: as the footnote shows, the literal rendering is 'his feet', which in reality refers to the private parts (cp. Isa. 6: 2). It must here relate to Moses so that by touching Moses with the foreskin of his son's circumcision Zipporah made her action count for the circumcision of Moses himself.

*You are my blood-bridegroom*: this title is clearly a very ancient one, reflecting the practice of circumcision, not in infancy, as came to be normal in Israel, but in adolescence. It appears that at one time it was carried out before marriage by the future father-in-law, as is suggested by the Hebrew word for the



latter, which means literally 'circumciser'. The practice was later transferred to infancy in Israel, perhaps for humanitarian reasons, at a date which cannot now be determined.

30. *he performed the signs*: these were the signs authorized to Moses in 4: 1-9. Contrary to Moses' expectations, the people readily believe him, and he is fully accepted as a new leader. \*

#### THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART

- 5 After this, Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said, 'These are the words of the LORD the God of Israel: "Let my people go so that they may keep my pilgrim-feast in  
2 the wilderness.'" 'Who is the LORD,' asked Pharaoh, 'that I should obey him and let Israel go? I care nothing for the  
3 LORD: and I tell you I will not let Israel go.' They replied, 'It has happened that the God of the Hebrews met us. So let us go three days' journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifice to the LORD our God, or else he will attack us  
4 with pestilence or sword.' But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, what do you mean by distracting the  
5 people from their work? Back to your labours! Your people already outnumber the native Egyptians;<sup>a</sup> yet you would have them stop working!'
- 6 That very day Pharaoh ordered the people's overseers  
7 and their foremen not to supply the people with the straw used in making bricks, as they had done hitherto. 'Let  
8 them go and collect their own straw, but see that they produce the same tally of bricks as before. On no account reduce it. They are a lazy people, and that is why they are  
9 clamouring to go and offer sacrifice to their god. Keep the men hard at work; let them attend to that and take no

[a] *Prob. rdg., cp. Sam.; Heb.* The people of the land are already many.

notice of a pack of lies.' The overseers and foremen went <sup>10</sup> out and said to the people, 'Pharaoh's orders are that no more straw is to be supplied. Go and get it for yourselves <sup>11</sup> wherever you can find it; but there will be no reduction in your daily task.' So the people scattered all over Egypt to <sup>12</sup> gather stubble for straw, while the overseers kept urging <sup>13</sup> them on, bidding them complete, day after day, the same quantity as when straw was supplied. Then the Israelite <sup>14</sup> foremen were flogged because they were held responsible by Pharaoh's overseers, who asked them, 'Why did you not complete the usual number of bricks yesterday or today?' So the foremen came and appealed to Pharaoh: <sup>15</sup> 'Why do you treat your servants like this?' they said. 'We are given no straw, yet they keep on telling us to make <sup>16</sup> bricks. Here are we being flogged, but it is your people's fault.' But Pharaoh replied, 'You are lazy, you are lazy. <sup>17</sup> That is why you talk about going to offer sacrifice to the LORD. Now go; get on with your work. You will be given <sup>18</sup> no straw, but you must produce the tally of bricks.' When <sup>19</sup> they were told that they must not let the daily tally of bricks fall short, the Israelite foremen saw that they were in trouble. As they came out from Pharaoh's presence they <sup>20</sup> found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and said, <sup>21</sup> 'May this bring the LORD's judgement down upon you: you have made us stink in the nostrils of Pharaoh and his subjects; you have put a sword in their hands to kill us.'

Moses went back to the LORD, and said, 'Why, O Lord, <sup>22</sup> hast thou brought misfortune on this people? And why didst thou ever send me? Since I first went to Pharaoh to <sup>23</sup> speak in thy name he has heaped misfortune on thy people, and thou hast done nothing at all to rescue them.' The **6**



LORD answered, 'Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. In the end Pharaoh will let them go with a strong hand, nay, will drive them from his country with an outstretched arm.'<sup>a</sup>

\* We now have a fuller presentation, mainly from J, of the further major theme of the exodus story that, in spite of the divine authority which underlies the mission of Moses, Pharaoh will not let the Israelites go. The divine plan at first appears to be thwarted and the situation temporarily worsens. Yet in reality God is at work in this, and it is he who is mysteriously using these initial setbacks to achieve a greater victory (6: 1). The LORD himself is hardening Pharaoh's heart, so that when the final deliverance comes it will be wholly seen for what it is: the mighty act of God. Nonetheless, before this can happen the Israelites fall into despair and turn violently against Moses and Aaron (5: 21). Moses too, overwhelmed by this reverse, turns bitterly in complaint to God (5: 22-3).

5: 1. *so that they may keep my pilgrim-feast*: the Hebrew word for 'pilgrim-feast' indicates one in which the celebration took place after a pilgrimage to a sanctuary. In this case it indicates a journey to Mount Horeb, where Moses had encountered God and to which the people were to be brought (3: 12).

2. *I care nothing for the LORD*: Pharaoh did not acknowledge the LORD, the God of Israel, since he was himself, according to Egyptian religion, the son and manifestation of deity. Thus he could not admit that the word of any other man or God was superior to his own wishes. The eventual humiliation of Pharaoh, and the frustrating of his power over the Israelites, thus serves indirectly to make nonsense of the claim for Pharaoh's divine status.

3. *or else he will attack us*: threats of disease and violent oppression formed traditional pictures of the fate of persons

[a] *So Sept.; Heb.* with a strong hand.

who offended a deity, and thus fell under his curse. Cp. Lev. 26: 14 ff.; Deut. 28: 15 ff.

5. *Your people already outnumber*: this is the most probable interpretation of a statement which is otherwise without clear significance. Cp. note [a].

6. *the people's overseers*: these would have been the Egyptian guards responsible for superintending the slave labour and the Israelite foremen who were given charge of the individual work-gangs.

7. *the straw used in making bricks*: Egyptian bricks were larger than is usual today, and were made from mud mixed with chopped straw, or reed, to help bind them together. They were dried in the sun, and retained the black appearance of mud.

14. *Then the Israelite foremen were flogged*: an instructive picture of the organization of the work-gangs in which the foreman of each gang was personally held responsible for its daily production output.

19. *saw that they were in trouble*: in gaining no concession from Pharaoh regarding the daily total of bricks to be produced, and having already been flogged, the foremen now faced the further trouble of having to tell the Israelites that there was no hope of any relaxation in the future.

20. *they found Moses and Aaron*: the worsening of the situation, and the antipathy to Moses and Aaron which this naturally produced, increase the note of tension before the final deliverance comes. When confronted with God's promise of freedom and effective leadership the reaction of men quickly becomes one of unbelief and distrust, and is only overcome by further demonstrations of God's power.

22. *And why didst thou ever send me?*: even Moses is quickly caught up in the prevalent gloom at the disastrous turn of events. Yet the final outcome of the situation only serves to demonstrate that God is able to do more than even the most loyal of his worshippers dare believe. \*



## A FURTHER REVELATION TO MOSES

- 2, 3 God spoke to Moses and said, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty.<sup>a</sup> But I did not let myself be known to them by my name JEHOVAH.<sup>b</sup>
- 4 Moreover, I made a covenant with them to give them Canaan, the land where they settled for a time as foreigners.
- 5 And now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians, and I have called my covenant to
- 6 mind. Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the LORD. I will release you from your labours in Egypt. I will rescue you from slavery there. I will redeem you with arm out-
- 7 stretched and with mighty acts of judgement. I will adopt you as my people, and I will become your God. You shall know that I, the LORD, am your God, the God who re-
- 8 leases you from your labours in Egypt. I will lead you to the land which I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it you for your possession. I am the LORD."
- 9 Moses repeated these words to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him; they had become impatient because of their cruel slavery.
- 10, 11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to set the Israelites free to leave
- 12 his country.' Moses made answer in the presence of the LORD, 'If the Israelites do not listen to me, how will Pharaoh listen to such a halting speaker as I am<sup>c</sup>?'
- 13 Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them their commission to the Israelites and to Pharaoh, namely that they should bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

[a] Heb. El-Shaddai.

[b] See note on 3: 15.

[c] to such... I am: *lit.* to me, seeing I am uncircumcised of lips.

\* After the initial rebuff from Pharaoh, Moses receives a further revelation of God which commissions him again to his task of leading Israel out of Egypt. In its present position this account serves to re-arm Moses' failing courage, but in itself the narrative forms a parallel to the original call in ch. 3. We have here the P source's account of Moses' call, which has been woven into the sequence of narratives in such a way as to serve to reinforce the older (E) account.

6: 3. *I appeared to Abraham*: the P source agrees with E (Exod. 3: 13 ff.) that although Israel's ancestors worshipped the same God as Moses they did not know him by the name LORD. It expresses a considered history of the periods of God's revelation to Israel. From creation to Abraham God was called simply 'God' (Heb. *elōhīm*), until he then disclosed to Abraham his new name, God Almighty (Heb. *El-Shaddai*), Gen. 17: 1 ff. The exact meaning of this name is uncertain, but perhaps originally it meant 'Mountain God', or 'God of the (Mountain) Land'. In later Jewish interpretation it was taken to mean 'God Almighty', or 'My (thy) God', although these interpretations are based upon a misunderstanding of the etymology of the name.

*I did not let myself be known to them*: see above on 3: 13 ff. On this point the P source here is in agreement with what has previously been affirmed by the E source.

4. *I made a covenant with them*: this is the covenant with the patriarchs which the P source describes in Gen. 17: 1-14. It especially included in its terms the promise of permanent possession of the land of Canaan (Gen. 17: 8), the fulfilment of which is being thwarted by Israel's being held in Egypt as slaves.

5. *I have called my covenant to mind*: cp. 2: 25. The author strongly emphasizes that the exodus took place because God remembered his covenant promise to Abraham. The whole memory of Israel's patriarchal ancestors is focused in their receiving the promise of the land.

6. *I will redeem you*: the Hebrew word used here denotes



the right of a member of a family to acquire persons or property belonging to that family which was in danger of falling to outside claimants. Thus if a member of the family was forced to sell himself into slavery, other members retained a special privilege of purchasing his freedom (Lev. 25: 48). Here it expresses God's protective action towards those who were regarded as belonging to him.

*with mighty acts of judgement*: the acts of judgement are positive actions by which God sets free the oppressed Hebrews, and only in a secondary and indirect way is any reference intended to punitive acts of retribution against the Egyptians.

7. *and I will become your God*: in accordance with the terms of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17: 8). The phrase denotes the closeness of God's relationship to Israel, and his exclusive claim upon their worship.

*You shall know*: this 'Recognition Formula' appears several times in P, in Deutero-Isaiah and in Ezekiel (Exod. 7: 5 etc.; Isa. 45: 3, 6; Ezek. 7: 27; 11: 10 etc.). It developed out of the assertion of the LORD's exclusive claim upon Israel declared in its worship (cp. Exod. 20: 2, 3). In the present passage it refers to a recognition of the reality and power of God as evidenced by events that are to happen. The interpretation of these events as the acts of God is to lead to a recognition of his reality and power. In this way both Israel and the nations are to know that the LORD is the true God.

8. *which I swore*: the lifting up of the hand in affirming an oath is shown further in Deut. 32: 40; Ps. 106: 26.

*I am the LORD*: this solemn affirmation is frequently used to close a speech of God. \*

#### A LIST OF ISRAELITE FAMILIES

14<sup>a</sup> These were the heads of fathers' families:

Sons of Reuben, Israel's eldest son: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these were the families of Reuben.

[a] Verses 14-16: cp. Gen. 46: 8-11; Num. 26: 5, 6, 12, 13.

Sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, <sup>15</sup>  
and Saul, who was the son of a Canaanite woman; these  
were the families of Simeon.

These were the names of the sons of Levi in order of <sup>16</sup>  
seniority: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived to be  
a hundred and thirty-seven.

Sons of Gershon, family by family: Libni and Shimei. <sup>17</sup>

Sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. <sup>18</sup>  
Kohath lived to be a hundred and thirty-three.

Sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. <sup>19</sup>

These were the families of Levi in order of seniority.  
Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore <sup>20</sup>  
him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived to be a hundred and  
thirty-seven.

Sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg and Zichri. <sup>21</sup>

Sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri. <sup>22</sup>

Aaron married Elisheba, who was the daughter of <sup>23</sup>  
Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him  
Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph; these were <sup>24</sup>  
the Korahite families.

Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of <sup>25</sup>  
Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These were the heads  
of the Levite families, family by family.

It was this Aaron, together with Moses, to whom the <sup>26</sup>  
LORD said, 'Bring the Israelites out of Egypt, mustered in  
their tribal hosts.' These were the men who told Pharaoh <sup>27</sup>  
king of Egypt to let the Israelites leave Egypt. It was this  
same Moses and Aaron.



\* This list has been introduced into the P narrative, which makes frequent use of genealogies to mark the progress of history (Gen. 5: 11; 25: 12-16; 46: 8-27 etc.). It is concerned here to establish the Levitical descent of Moses and Aaron, for which see on 2: 1. Hence, although it begins by introducing the descendants of Reuben and Simeon, following the list of Gen. 46: 8 ff., when it reaches Jacob's third son, Levi, it simply continues by listing the various branches of the Levite family in verses 16-27. This follows the list of Levi's descendants in Num. 3: 17 ff.

20. *Amram married his father's sister Jochebed*: for Amram cp. Num. 3: 19; 1 Chron. 6: 2, 18. Jochebed is only elsewhere mentioned in Num. 26: 59. It is noteworthy that her name, which means 'the LORD is glory', is made up from the distinctive name of the LORD, or Yahweh, which was only revealed through Moses. This suggests that the name had already been in use among Moses' ancestors, but had received a new significance and interpretation through Moses.

*and she bore him Aaron and Moses*: Sept., Sam. and the Syriac version add 'and Miriam', to make the list more complete. Cp. Num. 26: 59 for a similar reference to Moses' parents and family. \*

#### SIGNS AND WONDERS BEFORE PHARAOH

We now begin a series of nine plagues, which in various ways brought shame or punishment upon the Egyptians. The tenth and greatest plague consists in the sudden death of the Egyptian first-born, and this is narrated in chapter 12 in connection with the introduction of the feast of Passover. These plagues are signs, and altogether they make up the 'signs and wonders' which Israel remembered in connection with its deliverance from Egypt. Just as the exodus itself was a demonstration of divine power in the world, so these plagues also were regarded as further illustrations of the same power intended to make both Israelites and Egyptians recognize the hand of God in

these events. That ten such plagues were required, and that even after the last and most terrible of them, Pharaoh was not sufficiently convinced of the power of the LORD God as to let Israel go unopposed, does not contradict their purpose as signs of God's power. In a deep and subtle mystery the narrator tells us that it is the LORD who has hardened Pharaoh's heart to make him stubborn (7: 3). Thus God himself withheld from Pharaoh the ability to recognize the divine meaning of these plagues, so that in the end that meaning might be given with absolute plainness for all to see. Cp. Paul's reference to this in Rom. 9: 17: 'For Scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for this very purpose, to exhibit my power in my dealings with you, and to spread my fame over all the world."'

The accounts of the various plagues are not all from one source, and their number, ten, is clearly not original to any one source, but has arisen from the compilation of the various plague narratives from each source (J, E and P). The purpose of the plagues as 'signs and wonders' is important for an understanding of their historical background. Instead of looking for 'natural' explanations of 'supernatural' occurrences, we must recognize that the authors have put together dramatized stories of various natural and unusual features of life in Egypt. The very adverse judgement on these aspects of Egyptian life both reflects their genuine unpleasantness in some cases and their extraordinary nature in others. The final plague, the death of the Egyptian first-born, has an altogether different explanation and origin.

#### THE SIGN OF AARON'S STAFF

When the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt he said, 'I am <sup>28, 29</sup> the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.' Moses made answer in the presence of the LORD, 'I am <sup>30</sup> a halting speaker; how will Pharaoh listen to me?' The **7** LORD answered Moses, 'See now, I have made you like



a god for Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your  
2 spokesman.<sup>a</sup> You must tell your brother Aaron all I bid  
you say, and he will tell Pharaoh, and Pharaoh will let  
3 the Israelites go out of his country; but I will make him  
stubborn. Then will I show sign after sign and portent  
4 after portent in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not  
listen to you, so I will assert my power in Egypt, and with  
mighty acts of judgement I will bring my people, the  
5 Israelites, out of Egypt in their tribal hosts. When I put  
forth my power against the Egyptians and bring the  
Israelites out from them, then Egypt will know that I am  
6 the LORD.' So Moses and Aaron did exactly as the LORD  
7 had commanded. At the time when they spoke to Pharaoh,  
Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three.  
8, 9 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'If Pharaoh de-  
mands some portent from you, then you, Moses, must  
say to Aaron, "Take your staff and throw it down in  
10 front of Pharaoh, and it will turn into a serpent.'" When  
Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, they did as the LORD  
had told them. Aaron threw down his staff in front of  
11 Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent. At  
this, Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers,  
and the Egyptian magicians too did the same thing by  
12 their spells. Every man threw his staff down, and each  
staff turned into a serpent; but Aaron's staff swallowed up  
13 theirs. Pharaoh, however, was obstinate; as the LORD had  
foretold, he would not listen to Moses and Aaron.

\* The story is now resumed from 6: 13, with a further intro-  
ductory emphasis upon the role of Aaron as Moses' spokesman

[a] *Lit. prophet.*

and Aaron's staff as a proof of the divine commission given to Moses. In 4: 17 this staff was left in the possession of Moses. This emphasis upon the activity of Aaron and his use of the staff is characteristic of the P source, which is found here. This initial demonstration of the LORD's power serves as a prelude to the much greater and more damaging demonstrations of divine power given in the accounts of the plagues which follow. Furthermore, this introductory confrontation between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh establishes the pattern which is to follow, in which we learn that behind the outward course of events it is the LORD himself who is hardening Pharaoh's heart to make him stubborn (7: 3). This divinely ordained obstinacy is intended to bring about a greater and fuller revelation of the power of the LORD, especially in contrast to the Egyptian magicians (verses 11-13).

7: 1. *I have made you like a god*: cp. 4: 16. The point of the analogy lies in the relationship which it describes between Aaron and Moses.

4. *I will assert my power*: the Hebrew is literally 'I will lay my hand upon Egypt'. The power of Israel's God in Egypt is such that he is completely superior to all the gods of the Egyptians. Thus the signs and portents which he performs demonstrate his reality, and the 'nothingness' of the Egyptian deities.

*in their tribal hosts*: the author has introduced an anachronism here in presenting the Israelites in Egypt as organized into separate tribes. These tribal divisions reflect the geographical conditions of Israel's settlement in Canaan, and are not therefore appropriate to the ancestors of the nation who were in Egypt.

5. *Egypt will know that I am the LORD*: cp. on 6: 7 for the 'Recognition Formula'. As a result of the signs and portents the Egyptians are to recognize that the LORD alone is worthy of the title 'God', although there is no implication that they will subsequently turn to worship him.

7. *Moses was eighty years old*: the ages of Moses and Aaron



are only given by the P source, which consistently shows an interest in recording a precise, though often very artificial, chronology.

9. *If Pharaoh demands some portent*: in 4: 1-9 (J) Moses was given three signs to perform before the Israelites in order to demonstrate his divine commission. The first of these (4: 1-5) was a rod which became a serpent. Here, in a P account of these signs, they are performed by Aaron before Pharaoh in order to convince him that the request made by Moses is a divine command.

10. *it turned into a serpent*: cp. 4: 3. The word used here for serpent (Heb. *tannīn*) is different from that for 'snake' (Heb. *nāḥāsh*) used in 4: 3. It refers to any kind of large reptile, whether living on land or in fresh or sea water (Gen. 1: 21; Deut. 32: 33; Ps. 74: 13; 91: 13). It is possible therefore that in this passage some other reptile than a snake was in the author's mind, perhaps a crocodile, which was common in the upper Nile.

11. *the wise men and the sorcerers*: Egypt was famous in the ancient world for its wise men and magicians (cp. Gen. 41: 8, 24). The particular skill of the sorcerers appears, from the etymology of the name, to have consisted in casting spells. \*

#### THE FIRST PLAGUE: THE NILE TURNED INTO BLOOD

14 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Pharaoh is obdurate: he  
15 has refused to set the people free. Go to him in the morn-  
ing on his way out to the river. Stand and wait on the  
bank of the Nile to meet him, and take with you the staff  
16 that turned into a snake. Say this to him: "The LORD the  
God of the Hebrews sent me to bid you let his people go  
in order to worship him in the wilderness. So far you have  
17 not listened to his words; so now the LORD says, 'By this  
you shall know that I am the LORD.' With this rod that I  
have in my hand, I shall now strike the water in the Nile

and it will be changed into blood. The fish will die and the 18  
river will stink, and the Egyptians will be unable to drink  
water from the Nile.” The LORD then told Moses to say 19  
to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch your hand out over  
the waters of Egypt, its rivers and its streams, and over  
every pool and cistern, to turn them into blood. There  
shall be blood throughout the whole of Egypt, blood even  
in their wooden bowls and jars of stone.’ So Moses and 20  
Aaron did as the LORD had commanded. He lifted up his  
staff and struck the water of the Nile in the sight of  
Pharaoh and his courtiers, and all the water was changed  
into blood. The fish died and the river stank, and the 21  
Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was  
blood everywhere in Egypt. But the Egyptian magicians 22  
did the same thing by their spells; and still Pharaoh re-  
mained obstinate, as the LORD had foretold, and did not  
listen to Moses and Aaron. He turned away, went into his 23  
house and dismissed the matter from his mind. Then the 24  
Egyptians all dug for drinking water round about the  
river, because they could not drink from the waters of the  
Nile itself. This lasted for seven days from the time when 25  
the LORD struck the Nile.

\* The first plague is the turning of the water of the Nile into blood. At the time when the Nile rises at the beginning of its flood season (late June) it carries with it a large quantity of reddish-brown soil deposit (red marl) which gives it a dark, opaque appearance, which could readily be compared with blood. The account is combined from both J and P sources, and it is clear that the later, P, account has heightened the story to affirm that all the water of Egypt was affected, and not just that of the Nile (verses 19, 21).



14. *to set the people free*: although Moses is requesting no more than permission for a temporary release from work in order to worship the LORD in the wilderness, it becomes implicit that a greater freedom is envisaged. Pharaoh fully realizes this, and the sequel shows that the Israelites also expected it.

15. *on his way out to the river*: no hint is given as to the reason for this visit to the Nile, although it is assumed to be a regular daily occurrence. It appears to refer to a specific ritual of bathing (cp. 2: 5), which was no doubt linked to the great religious veneration for the river.

17. *With this rod*: cp. 4: 9 (J), where water from the Nile becomes blood when it is poured out on the ground, as the third of the signs by which Moses establishes his divine authority before the Israelites. From being itself a 'sign' the staff has here become an instrument for the performance of further signs.

18. *The fish will die*: the death of the fish through unusually heavy pollution of the Nile water is readily intelligible in connection with the explanation given of the turning of the Nile water into blood.

19. *Take your staff*: not only the Nile water, but also all other usable water in Egypt was to be turned into blood. This heightening of the extent of the plague comes from the P source.

*even in their wooden bowls*: the phrase is literally 'both in trees and stones'. It refers either to the materials from which liquid containers were made, as the present translation implies, or more loosely to the 'blood' being drawn up into the trees and filling the rock pools.

22. *the Egyptian magicians did the same thing*: the ability of the Egyptian magicians to imitate Moses' action counters its significance as a sign of the LORD's power. It therefore helps to explain Pharaoh's obstinacy, even though it produces the ironic situation in which the Egyptians hurt themselves to prove that Moses is not the only one who has divine power.

24. *Then the Egyptians*: the note here is scarcely in agree-

ment with the extent of the plague recorded in verse 19. Similarly the fact that all the water has been turned to blood leaves unexplained where the Egyptian magicians got their water from. This inconsistency is to be explained from the combination of two (J and P) accounts. \*

## THE SECOND PLAGUE: FROGS

The LORD then told Moses to go into Pharaoh's presence **8**<sup>a</sup> and say to him, 'These are the words of the LORD: "Let my people go in order to worship me. If you refuse to let <sup>2</sup> them go, I will plague the whole of your territory with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with them. They shall come <sup>3</sup> up from the river into your house, into your bedroom and on to your bed, into the houses of your courtiers and your people, into your ovens and your kneading-troughs. The frogs shall clamber over you, your people, and your <sup>4</sup> courtiers.'" Then the LORD told Moses to say to Aaron, <sup>5</sup><sup>b</sup> 'Take your staff in your hand and stretch it out over the rivers, streams, and pools, to bring up frogs upon the land of Egypt.' So Aaron stretched out his hand over the <sup>6</sup> waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered all the land. The magicians did the same thing by their spells: <sup>7</sup> they too brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt. Then <sup>8</sup> Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. 'Pray to the LORD', he said, 'to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.' Moses said, 'Of your royal favour, appoint a time when <sup>9</sup> I may intercede for you and your courtiers and people, so that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, and none be left, except in the Nile.' 'Tomorrow', Pharaoh <sup>10</sup>

[a] 7: 26 in Heb.

[b] 8: 1 in Heb.



said. 'It shall be as you say,' replied Moses, 'so that you  
 11 may know there is no one like our God, the LORD. The  
 frogs shall depart from you, from your houses, your  
 courtiers, and your people: none shall be left except in  
 12 the Nile.' Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh's presence, and  
 Moses appealed to the LORD to remove the frogs which  
 13 he had brought on Pharaoh. The LORD did as Moses had  
 asked, and in house and courtyard and in the open the  
 14 frogs all perished. They piled them into countless heaps  
 15 and the land stank; but when Pharaoh found that he was  
 given relief he became obdurate; as the LORD had foretold,  
 he did not listen to Moses and Aaron.

\* With its extensive watercourses and swamps Egypt was notorious for its frogs and lizards. Thus the second plague takes the form of innumerable swarms of frogs, leaving their habitat in the rivers and swamps to infest the houses of the people. Like the first plague it consists in an unusually severe occurrence of what was a natural feature of life in Egypt. Frogs are only otherwise referred to in the Old Testament in Ps. 78: 45; 105: 30, in both cases in connection with the present plague. Like the first plague the narrative is drawn from both the J and P sources.

5. *stretch it out over the rivers*: in keeping with its presentation of the first plague as affecting all the water supplies of Egypt, the P narrative also records the plague of frogs as extending to other water sources besides the Nile.

7. *The magicians did the same thing*: once again the Egyptian magicians are prepared to add still further to the plague in order to prove that it is not a special sign from the God of Moses.

9. *Of your royal favour, appoint a time*: the Hebrew means 'show eminence above me', and indicates Moses' willingness to allow Pharaoh to fix the time when the plague should end.

By doing so he would know that Moses was the true agent of God, and that the court magicians possessed only inferior powers.

13. *the frogs all perished*: the proportions of the infestation of frogs result in their dying upon the dry ground, thereby adding to the unpleasantness of the experience. Even the remedy is not without its sting. Normally in the Nile various water birds eat frogs, and so reduce their numbers. \*

#### THE THIRD PLAGUE: MAGGOTS

The LORD then told Moses to say to Aaron, 'Stretch out 16 your staff and strike the dust on the ground, and it will turn into maggots throughout the land of Egypt', and they 17 obeyed. Aaron stretched out his staff and struck the dust, and it turned into maggots on man and beast. All the dust turned into maggots throughout the land of Egypt. The 18 magicians tried to produce maggots in the same way by their spells, but they failed. The maggots were everywhere, on man and beast. 'It is the finger of God', said 19 the magicians to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh remained obstinate; as the LORD had foretold, he did not listen to them.

\* The account of this plague comes entirely from the P source, and in its character it has much in common with the fourth plague, which is of insects. The various translators, both ancient and modern, of this passage have interpreted the Hebrew word, which is here translated 'maggots', in different ways. The ancient Greek and Latin translations took it to mean 'gnats', whilst the Jewish Targum and the Syriac version interpreted it as 'lice'. The translation 'maggots' finds support from Ecclesiasticus 10: 11, where the same word is used to describe vermin which consume corpses, hence 'maggots', although here also 'lice' is a possible rendering.



This time the Egyptian magicians are unable to imitate Aaron's action, and they confess that the plague is wrought by the LORD God. Nevertheless Pharaoh remains as obstinate as ever.

16. *strike the dust on the ground*: there seems to be a hint here of ancient beliefs about the spontaneous generation of maggots and insects out of dust. By God's commission Aaron has the power to infuse life into the dust of the ground.

19. *It is the finger of God*: only God could produce such results, thereby proving that Moses and Aaron had access to divine power, which was not available to the magicians. They must therefore be divinely sent, so that their actions prove them to be messengers of God. In this way it becomes transparently clear that the plague is a sign and not a punishment upon the Egyptians. \*

#### THE FOURTH PLAGUE: INSECTS

- 20 The LORD told Moses to rise early in the morning and stand in Pharaoh's path as he went out to the river and to say to him, 'These are the words of the LORD: "Let my  
21 people go in order to worship me. If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies upon you, your courtiers, your people, and your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with the swarms and so shall all  
22 the land they live in, but on that day I will make an exception of Goshen, the land where my people live: there shall be no swarms there. Thus you shall know that I, the  
23 LORD, am here in the land. I will make a distinction<sup>a</sup> between my people and yours. Tomorrow this sign shall  
24 appear.'" The LORD did this; dense swarms of flies infested Pharaoh's house and those of his courtiers; throughout

[a] *So Sept.; Heb.* redemption.

Egypt the land was threatened with ruin by the swarms. Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said to them, <sup>25</sup> 'Go and sacrifice to your God, but in this country.' 'That <sup>26</sup> we cannot do,' replied Moses, 'because the victim we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God is an abomination to the Egyptians. If the Egyptians see us offer such an animal, will they not stone us to death? We must go a three days' <sup>27</sup> journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he commands us.' 'I will let you go,' said Pharaoh, <sup>28</sup> 'and you shall sacrifice to your God in the wilderness; only do not go far. Now intercede for me.' Moses <sup>29</sup> answered, 'As soon as I leave you I will intercede with the LORD. Tomorrow the swarms will depart from Pharaoh, his courtiers, and his people. Only let not Pharaoh trifle any more with the people by preventing them from going to sacrifice to the LORD.' Then Moses left Pharaoh and <sup>30</sup> interceded with the LORD. The LORD did as Moses had <sup>31</sup> said; he removed the swarms from Pharaoh, his courtiers, and his people; not one was left. But once again Pharaoh <sup>32</sup> became obdurate and did not let the people go.

✱ The account of this plague is entirely from the J source, and reflects the fact that swarms of flies and mosquitoes are a common nuisance in Egypt, as in most hot countries. Breeding in the Nile and its swamplands, they appear in great swarms, settling everywhere, and causing irritation to men and animals. Inevitably also they act as carriers of disease. As in the case of the frogs the general nuisance is enlarged to the proportions of a plague by the numbers involved. This time the court magicians of Egypt are not called upon to counter the challenge of the plague by reproducing it themselves. Instead Pharaoh himself is convinced, and yields to the request of Moses, pleading with the Israelites not to go far. However, once



Moses has prayed for the plague to be called off, Pharaoh changes his mind, and the Israelites are not allowed to leave. Thus the tension mounts, and success is still denied to Moses.

20. *early in the morning*: cp. 7: 15 for the morning meeting with Pharaoh on his way to the Nile. Still no reason is given for the royal custom.

22. *I will make an exception of Goshen*: the J narrative pictures the Israelites as confined to live in the land of Goshen (Gen. 45: 10; 46: 28 etc.), whereas both P and E regard the Israelites as settled throughout Egypt. The district of Goshen was an area of about 60 square miles in the lower Delta region, lying about 50 miles north-east of present day Cairo.

That the swarms of insects would not infest the region of Goshen is intended to protect the Israelites and to show God's special care of them, since hitherto we have been left to assume that they were as troubled by the plagues as the Egyptians. By this act of discrimination the author prepares for the more significant act of discrimination associated with the death of the first-born of the Egyptians.

23. *I will make a distinction*: the Hebrew reading 'redemption' (see N.E.B. note) does not fit the context, and the Septuagint is undoubtedly correct in reading 'distinction', or 'division', which requires only a small emendation of the Hebrew text.

26. *an abomination to the Egyptians*: the animal which the Israelites intended to offer to the LORD was most probably a cow, and would have been regarded by the Egyptians as unlawful for use in this way. It would even have offended the Egyptians to witness the Israelite service, since they would have regarded it as an affront to their god. The cow was regarded as sacred to the Egyptian god Isis. Cp. Gen. 43: 32 for a distinction between Egyptians and Israelites at meal times.

27. *a three days' journey into the wilderness*: so also 3: 18; 5: 3. Already the Israelite insistence upon going into the wilderness has aroused Pharaoh's suspicions (verse 28), and it is now plain that he expects the Israelites to make a permanent

escape. This is tacitly acknowledged by the Israelites, and is assumed to be obvious to the reader.

29. *let not Pharaoh trifle any more*: by refusing to take seriously the request of Moses, Pharaoh was rejecting the evidence of the plagues as signs. It was not only men that he was thereby disregarding, but the LORD himself, who had commissioned Moses and empowered him to perform the signs. \*

#### THE FIFTH PLAGUE: CATTLE DISEASE

The LORD said to Moses, 'Go into Pharaoh's presence <sup>9</sup> and say to him, "These are the words of the LORD the God of the Hebrews: 'Let my people go in order to worship me.' If you refuse to let them go and still keep <sup>2</sup> your hold on them, the LORD will strike your grazing <sup>3</sup> herds, your horses and asses, your camels, cattle, and sheep with a terrible pestilence. But the LORD will make a distinction between Israel's herds and those of the Egyptians. Of all that belong to Israel not a single one shall die.'" The LORD fixed a time and said, 'Tomorrow I will do this <sup>5</sup> throughout the land.' The next day the LORD struck. All <sup>6</sup> the herds of Egypt died, but from the herds of the Israelites not one single beast died. Pharaoh inquired and <sup>7</sup> was told that not a beast from the herds of Israel had died; and yet he remained obdurate and did not let the people go.

\* This narrative comes entirely from the J source, and like the account of the fourth plague it includes a note that the region of Goshen where the Israelites were living was unaffected by the plague (verses 4, 6). The exact nature of the disease that is referred to is impossible to determine, since the Hebrew word that is used to describe it is a very general one for serious illness.



9: 3. *your camels*: camels do not appear to have been domesticated in ancient Egypt until the third century B.C. (cp. 4: 20), and the reference here is either anachronistic, or was intended to refer to camels brought into Egypt by trading caravans (cp. Gen. 12: 16, where Abraham had camels in Egypt and Gen. 37: 25 for an Ishmaelite camel caravan).

4. *Israel's herds*: that such unprivileged people as Hebrew slaves should have possessed flocks and herds in Egypt is improbable, but is in line with the author's view that the Israelites formed a self-contained community in Goshen. \*

#### THE SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS

8 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 'Take handfuls of soot from a kiln. Moses shall toss it into the air in Pharaoh's sight, and it will turn into a fine dust over the whole of Egypt. All over Egypt it will become festering boils on man and beast.' They took the soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air and it produced festering boils on man and beast. The magicians were no match for Moses because of the boils, which attacked them and all the Egyptians. But the LORD made Pharaoh obstinate; as the LORD had foretold to Moses, he did not listen to Moses and Aaron.

\* The exact nature of the plague referred to here is impossible to determine, but the notoriety of Egypt for skin disease is evident from Deut. 28: 27. The account comes entirely from the P source, and nothing is said about the Israelites being unaffected by the plague. The helplessness of the Egyptian magicians is stressed, in that even they fall victim to the boils.

8. *handfuls of soot from a kiln*: the kiln was used for baking pottery and for burning lime. The scattering of soot as dust over Egypt suggests a belief that boils were thought to be caused by dust particles causing irritation of the skin.

9. *festering boils on man and beast*: cp. Lev. 13: 12, 20, 25 for the disease. The Hebrew word used covers more than one type of such affliction. \*

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL

The LORD then told Moses to rise early in the morning, <sup>13</sup> present himself before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'These are the words of the LORD the God of the Hebrews: "Let my people go in order to worship me. This time I will <sup>14</sup> strike home with all my plagues against you, your courtiers, and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. By now I could have <sup>15</sup> stretched out my hand, and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have vanished from the earth. I have let you live only to show you my power and <sup>16</sup> to spread my fame throughout the land. Since you still <sup>17</sup> obstruct my people and will not let them go, tomorrow <sup>18</sup> at this time I will send a violent hailstorm, such as has never been in Egypt from its first beginnings until now. Send now and bring your herds under cover, and every- <sup>19</sup> thing you have out in the open field. If anything, whether man or beast, which happens to be in the open, is not brought in, the hail will fall on it, and it will die.'" Those <sup>20</sup> of Pharaoh's subjects who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and cattle into their houses. But those <sup>21</sup> who did not take to heart the word of the LORD left their slaves and cattle in the open.

The LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand <sup>22</sup> towards the sky to bring down hail on the whole land of Egypt, on man and beast and every growing thing throughout the land.' Moses stretched out his staff to- <sup>23</sup>



wards the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, with fire flashing down to the ground. The LORD rained down  
24 hail on the land of Egypt, hail and fiery flashes through the hail, so heavy that there had been nothing like it in all Egypt from the time that Egypt became a nation.  
25 Throughout Egypt the hail struck everything in the fields, both man and beast; it beat down every growing thing  
26 and shattered every tree. Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived, was there no hail.  
27 Pharaoh sent and summoned Moses and Aaron. 'This time I have sinned,' he said; 'the LORD is in the right;  
28 I and my people are in the wrong. Intercede with the LORD, for we can bear no more of this thunder and hail.'<sup>a</sup>  
29 I will let you go; you need wait no longer.' Moses said, 'When I leave the city I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder shall cease, and there shall be no more hail, so that you may know that the  
30 earth is the LORD's. But you and your subjects - I know  
31 that you do not yet fear the LORD God.' (The flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was in the ear  
32 and the flax in bud, but the wheat and spelt were not  
33 destroyed because they come later.) Moses left Pharaoh's presence, went out of the city and lifted up his hands to the LORD in prayer: the thunder and hail ceased, and no  
34 more rain fell. When Pharaoh saw that the downpour, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again, he  
35 and his courtiers, and became obdurate. So Pharaoh remained obstinate; as the LORD had foretold through Moses, he did not let the people go.

[a] Or, with Scroll and Sept., thunder and hail and fire.

\* The account of this plague is mainly taken from the J source, with some material added from elsewhere, probably from E. As in the other plague narratives from J there is a note remarking that the land of Goshen was unaffected by the plague, so that the Israelites escaped its ravages. In this case hail, accompanied by a violent storm, is the cause of the devastation. In Moses' speech to Pharaoh, which announces the coming disaster (verses 14-16), a full account is given of the purpose of the plagues. They are to demonstrate the incomparability of the LORD, the God of the Hebrews.

The element of tension which builds up through the sequence of plagues is skilfully expressed by a reference to the many Egyptians who believed Moses' word and took precautions against the hail, and by the reluctant submission even of Pharaoh himself to Moses' demands. Once the plague ceases, however, Pharaoh changes his mind and remains obstinate.

13. *early in the morning*: cp. 7: 15; 8: 20.

14. *I will strike home*: literally 'I am sending all my plagues into your heart'. The meaning is that the plague which is about to occur will be so severe that Pharaoh will be forced to consider both it, and all the preceding plagues, so as to take action in order to prevent any further such catastrophes.

*so that you may know*: for the formula see on 6: 7. The acknowledgement that the LORD, the God of the Israelites, was incomparable among the gods lies at the very heart of Israelite monotheism. Although it was only at a comparatively late stage of Israel's religious development that it affirmed categorically that no other god existed beside the LORD (see especially Isa. 43: 10; 44: 6), the belief that no other god was comparable to him in power is very much older, and is fundamental to the exodus tradition.

18. *I will send a violent hailstorm*: Egypt is not normally greatly affected by hailstorms, and this fact lends a certain distinctiveness to the event here. The LORD's sign is a natural event of unusual occurrence and unprecedented severity.

19. *bring your herds under cover*: a certain inconsistency in the



plague narrative emerges here since 9: 6 has asserted that all the herds of the Egyptians had died in the cattle plague. Whilst it is possible to make allowances for an element of exaggeration, we must recognize that the whole series of plague narratives has telescoped into one brief sequence of events natural features to which Egypt was either regularly or occasionally prone. A more conscious attempt to avoid such inconsistency is to be found in 10: 5, 15, in connection with the plague of locusts.

20. *Those of Pharaoh's subjects*: the weakening of Pharaoh's power to resist God's will is shown by this note concerning his subjects who were by now ready to believe Moses' word. The announcement of the plague thus provides an opportunity for those who recognize that Moses is speaking the truth to save their slaves and cattle from its effects.

27. *Pharaoh sent*: by now Pharaoh is prepared to be convinced, and so he summons Moses to express his willingness to accede to their demands. He does this with an open confession of his own and his people's fault. They have acted unjustly in regard to the Israelite slaves. Significantly the injustice done to the Israelites is represented as an injustice perpetrated against their God.

30. *you do not yet fear the LORD God*: in spite of Pharaoh's protestations of penitence and submission, Moses recognizes the superficiality of his promises. Already he has been forewarned with the knowledge that Pharaoh's obstinacy is the result of the LORD's 'hardening' of his heart. The sudden reversal of his decision, therefore, after the plague has ceased, comes as no surprise to Moses, who is able to see in it the further action of God. In spite of all appearances Pharaoh's actions do not frustrate God's purposes, but hasten them towards fulfilment.

31. *The flax and barley were destroyed*: the note in verses 31-2 making clear exactly which crops suffered from the hail interrupts the story, which continues in verse 33. It is a supplementary note which has been added by a scribe who was anxious to remove any appearance of inconsistency in connection with the next plague. See 10: 15. \*

## THE EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go into Pharaoh's presence. **10** I have made him and his courtiers obdurate, so that I may show these my signs among them,<sup>a</sup> and so that you can <sup>2</sup> tell your children and grandchildren the story: how I made sport of the Egyptians, and what signs I showed among them. Thus you will know that I am the LORD.' Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, <sup>3</sup> 'These are the words of the LORD the God of the Hebrews: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go in order to worship me. If you <sup>4</sup> refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country. They shall cover the face of the land <sup>5</sup> so that it cannot be seen. They shall eat up the last remnant left you by the hail. They shall devour every tree that grows in your country-side. Your houses and <sup>6</sup> your courtiers' houses, every house in Egypt, shall be full of them; your fathers never saw the like nor their fathers before them; such a thing has not happened from their time until now.'" He turned and left Pharaoh's presence. Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, 'How long must we <sup>7</sup> be caught in this man's toils? Let their menfolk go and worship the LORD their God. Do you not know by now that Egypt is ruined?' So Moses and Aaron were brought <sup>8</sup> back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, 'You may go and worship the LORD your God; but who exactly is to go?' 'All,' said Moses, 'young and old, boys and girls, sheep <sup>9</sup> and cattle; for we have to keep the LORD's pilgrim-feast.' Pharaoh replied, 'Very well then; take your dependants <sup>10</sup>

[a] *So Sept.; Heb. in his midst.*



- with you when you go; and the LORD be with you. But  
11 beware, there is trouble in store for you. No, your  
menfolk may go and worship the LORD, for that is all  
you asked.' So they were driven out from Pharaoh's  
presence.
- 12 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand  
over Egypt so that the locusts may come<sup>a</sup> and invade the  
land and devour all the vegetation in it, everything the  
13 hail has left.' Moses stretched out his staff over the land  
of Egypt, and the LORD sent a wind roaring in from the  
east all that day and all that night. When morning came,  
14 the east wind had brought the locusts. They invaded the  
whole land of Egypt, and settled on all its territory in  
swarms so dense that the like of them had never been seen  
15 before, nor ever will be again. They covered the surface  
of the whole land till it was black with them. They de-  
voured all the vegetation and all the fruit of the trees that  
the hail had spared. There was no green left on tree or  
16 plant throughout all Egypt. Pharaoh hastily summoned  
Moses and Aaron. 'I have sinned against the LORD your  
17 God and against you', he said. 'Forgive my sin, I pray,  
just this once. Intercede with the LORD your God and beg  
18 him only to remove this deadly plague from me.' Moses  
19 left Pharaoh and interceded with the LORD. The LORD  
changed the wind into a westerly gale, which carried the  
locusts away and swept them into the Red Sea.<sup>b</sup> There  
was not a single locust left in all the territory of Egypt.  
20 But the LORD made Pharaoh obstinate, and he did not let  
the Israelites go.

[a] so that . . . come: *so Sept.; Heb.* with the locusts.

[b] Or the Sea of Reeds.

\* The basis of the narrative of this plague is again from J, with short additional comments added later, which are usually thought to come from E. This time the negotiations with Pharaoh form the centre of interest, and the details of the locust plague are only briefly given. The situation created by the plagues is nearing its climax, and this fact is brought out very skilfully by the author. Not only are many of Pharaoh's subjects anxious to accept the word of Moses (cp. 9: 20-1), but now even his courtiers urge him to yield to the Israelite demands (10: 7). Thus Pharaoh is compelled at this stage to open serious negotiations with Moses to find out exactly who are to be included in his request for permission to go into the wilderness (verses 8-11). Moses demands that all should go, including children, flocks and herds, but Pharaoh is unwilling to yield so far and is only prepared to let the menfolk go. By the nature of his request Moses hints that more than a temporary pilgrimage for worship is in mind. Since Pharaoh realizes this, he endeavours to prevent such wholesale departure by holding back the women, children and possessions.

12. *so that the locusts may come*: a plague of locusts was one of the most dramatic and feared expressions of natural disaster in the ancient world. Their remarkable powers of proliferation in a short space of time and their sudden migrations in vast numbers made them a powerful destructive force. They could rapidly destroy the entire vegetation of a large area. Moses here becomes the agent for summoning a swarm of locusts, which are particularly associated with the region of the upper Nile.

13. *the LORD sent a wind*: although locust migrations are basically caused by the need to find fresh sources of food, both ancient and modern observers have noted their connection with movements of the wind.

18. *Moses left Pharaoh*: that Moses should trust Pharaoh's word so implicitly, and that God should heed Moses' intercession, are surprising in view of the forewarnings about Pharaoh's obstinacy. Yet it is a part of the mysterious way in which God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart takes place that it



should leave him with no excuse for ignoring God's demonstration of power, and with every opportunity of heeding it. Only by giving Pharaoh this opportunity can his total submission to God be brought about. \*

## THE NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS

- 21 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand towards the sky so that there may be darkness over the  
22 land of Egypt, darkness that can be felt.' Moses stretched out his hand towards the sky, and it became pitch dark  
23 throughout the land of Egypt for three days. Men could not see one another; for three days no one stirred from where he was. But there was no darkness wherever the  
24 Israelites lived. Pharaoh summoned Moses. 'Go', he said, 'and worship the LORD. Your dependants may go with  
25 you; but your flocks and herds must be left with us.' But Moses said, 'No, you must yourself supply us with animals for sacrifice and whole-offering to the LORD our  
26 God; and our own flocks must go with us too – not a hoof must be left behind. We may need animals from our own flocks to worship the LORD our God; we ourselves cannot tell until we are there how we are to worship the  
27 LORD.' The LORD made Pharaoh obstinate, and he refused  
28 to let them go. 'Out! Pester me no more!' he said to Moses. 'Take care you do not see my face again, for on  
29 the day you do, you die.' 'You are right,' said Moses; 'I shall never see your face again.'

\* This account is from J, supplemented from E. The series of plagues is now brought towards its climax, and we find Pharaoh negotiating seriously with Moses and willing to allow all the women and children of the Israelites to depart; only

the flocks and herds are to remain behind as a guarantee of return. With a touch of irony Moses now demands that not only must these animals go, but that the Egyptians must supply further animals for sacrifice. At this impertinent demand Pharaoh rebukes Moses, forbidding him to enter his presence any more, and this rebuff brings an end to the whole series of negotiations between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh, concerned with God's signs and wonders.

By the plague of darkness a severe sandstorm may be meant. These occur frequently in the spring in Egypt, when the hot south-east wind, the *Hamsin*, blows thick clouds of sand which penetrate everywhere, producing a *darkness that can be felt*. There is no mention of any wind, however, and a supernatural darkness may be simply what is intended, one which has no natural explanation.

21. *darkness that can be felt*: the Hebrew is literally 'so that one may feel darkness'. The density of the sandstorm is such that normal visibility is reduced almost to nothing, which evokes a sensation of gloom and impending disaster. Alternatively it is possible to translate the Hebrew 'so that one gropes about in darkness', but this is less probable.

23. *there was no darkness wherever the Israelites lived*: cp. on 8: 22 for the exception granted to the Israelites. The author is anxious to affirm that the Israelites were spared any discomfort, and that the plagues were intended only for the Egyptians, to whom they were signs of the LORD's power.

24. *but your flocks and herds*: the retention of the property of the Israelites was intended by Pharaoh to serve as an assurance that the Israelites would return to Egypt. Moses had no intention of conceding this, and affirms his point not only by refusing such a demand, but by adding a counter-demand of his own.

26. *we ourselves cannot tell until we are there*: only when the Israelites were at the site where their sacrifices were to be offered would God show them exactly what he required. Thus Moses demands that the Israelites take all their possessions



with them so that they could be sure to have what God wanted.

28. *Take care you do not see my face again:* Moses does not finally leave Pharaoh's presence until 11: 8, after the announcement of the tenth plague, when he departs in great anger. 11: 1-10, however, is a later scene which is not altogether in harmony with the conversation here, which envisages a complete end to all further negotiations immediately. There is an ironic note in the fact that Pharaoh's bitter rebuke to Moses becomes a prophecy of his own failure to prevent the departure of the Israelites. The appearance of two final interviews between Moses and Pharaoh is a result of the combining together of more than one source, which have only partially been harmonized. \*

#### THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TENTH PLAGUE

11 Then the LORD said to Moses, 'One last plague I will bring upon Pharaoh and Egypt. After that he will let you go; he will send you packing, as a man dismisses a rejected  
2 bride. Let the people be told that men and women alike should ask their neighbours for jewellery of silver and  
3 gold.' The LORD made the Egyptians well-disposed towards them, and, moreover, Moses was a very great man in Egypt in the eyes of Pharaoh's courtiers and of the people.

4 Moses then said, 'These are the words of the LORD: "At  
5 midnight I will go out among the Egyptians. Every first-born creature in the land of Egypt shall die: the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, the first-born of the slave-girl at the handmill, and all the first-born of the  
6 cattle. All Egypt will send up a great cry of anguish, a cry the like of which has never been heard before, nor ever  
7 will be again. But among all Israel not a dog's tongue

shall be so much as scratched, no man or beast be hurt." Thus you shall know that the LORD does make a distinction between Egypt and Israel. Then all these courtiers of yours will come down to me, prostrate themselves and cry, "Go away, you and all the people who follow at your heels." After that I will go away.' Then Moses left Pharaoh's presence hot with anger.

The LORD said to Moses, 'Pharaoh will not listen to you; I will therefore show still more portents in the land of Egypt.' All these portents had Moses and Aaron shown in the presence of Pharaoh, and yet the LORD made him obstinate, and he did not let the Israelites leave the country.

\* This section brings the story of the plagues to a climax by introducing the threat of the tenth plague, the death of the Egyptian first-born. This does not actually take place until 12: 29 ff., following the account of the institution of the Pass-over with which it belongs. In fact all the nine plagues which have so far been described are a preparation for this final, terrible, event which they help to interpret. All three major sources are represented in this section, with the final summing up from P in verses 9-10 of the failure of all the plagues to change Pharaoh's obstinate attitude.

11: 2. *Let the people be told*: according to the instructions given in 3: 21, 22. The spoiling of the Egyptians was to serve as a punishment for the ill-treatment of the Israelite slaves, and also as a payment for the work they had been forced to do. Thus, in the narrator's eyes, it was an act of divine justice.

7. *not a dog's tongue shall be so much as scratched*: cp. Judith 11: 19 for this proverbial expression, and also Josh. 10: 21, where it occurs with 'no man' as the subject. The meaning of



the phrase is obscure, and another possible rendering is 'not even a dog shall bark', although this is less probable.

8. *Then all these courtiers*: the next plague will be so disastrous for Egypt that Pharaoh's hand will be forced, and his own courtiers will demand the release of the Israelites. Thus Pharaoh's obstinacy will undermine even his own authority as king. \*

\* \* \* \* \*

## *The institution of the Passover*

This section, with its instructions for the observance of a festival of Passover, provides a central point of connection between the narrative of the plagues and the account of Israel's departure from Egypt. It is at once both the occasion of the tenth plague and the final terrible 'sign' from God which secures the release of Israel.

The festival that is described, however, consists not of one celebration, but of two which have been combined: the festival of Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. These were at one time separate, the Passover being a nomadic sheep festival and the feast of Unleavened Bread a celebration related to cereal farming on the settled land. The present account was completed at a late period in Israel's development, and describes not the earliest form that the Passover celebration took, but a comparatively late one. Undoubtedly the celebration underwent changes in the course of its history, and two points are of primary importance: first, it is uncertain at what date the two feasts were combined together. This connection has been thought not to have occurred until the seventh century B.C., with the reign of Josiah (cp. 2 Kings 23: 21-3), but more probably it was earlier, and perhaps took place soon after Israel's settlement in Canaan. The second question concerns the place at which the Passover was celebrated. The present chapter presupposes that the Passover was a private

domestic celebration, and the sacred meal did not require to be eaten at a sanctuary. The account of the celebration in Josiah's time (621 B.C.), however, presupposes that the Passover meal was eaten at the sanctuary in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23: 23). The likelihood is that this represents a later modification of the earlier practice of celebrating it in private houses, and that this older practice was revived during Israel's exile in Babylon. It is this revival of the older practice which is presupposed in the account here.

It is unusual for the regulations concerning a religious feast to be given at a critical moment in Israel's history, rather than in the broader context of Israel's laws for worship (cp. Exod. 23: 14-17; Lev. 23; Deut. 16: 1-17). The exception here is occasioned by the very special way in which the Passover celebration served as a reminder of the exodus event. Since the Passover was the oldest of Israel's feasts, and the exodus represented the very hour of the nation's birth, there was an appropriateness in the close link between the two. The festival of Unleavened Bread had a separate link with the agricultural life of Canaan, but, like the Passover, it was a spring celebration, and so could be conveniently related to it and made to serve as a reminder of Israel's origin in the wilderness.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE FESTIVAL

THE LORD SAID to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: This 12 1, 2  
month is for you the first of months; you shall make  
it the first month of the year. Speak to the whole com- 3  
munity of Israel and say to them: On the tenth day of this  
month let each man take a lamb or a kid for his family,  
one for each household, but if a household is too small 4  
for one lamb or one kid, then the man and his nearest  
neighbour may take one between them. They shall share  
the cost, taking into account both the number of persons  
and the amount each of them eats. Your lamb or kid must 5



be without blemish, a yearling male. You may take  
6 equally a sheep or a goat. You must have it in safe keeping  
until the fourteenth day of this month, and then all the  
assembled community of Israel shall slaughter the victim  
7 between dusk and dark.<sup>a</sup> They must take some of the  
blood and smear it on the two door-posts and on the lintel  
8 of every house in which they eat the lamb. On that night  
they shall eat the flesh roast on the fire; they shall eat it  
9 with unleavened cakes and bitter herbs. You are not to  
eat any of it raw or even boiled in water, but roasted,  
10 head, shins, and entrails. You shall not leave any of it till  
morning; if anything is left over until morning, it must be  
destroyed by fire.

11 This is the way in which you must eat it: you shall have  
your belt fastened,<sup>b</sup> your sandals on your feet and your  
staff in your hand, and you must eat in urgent haste. It is  
12 the LORD's Passover. On that night I shall pass through  
the land of Egypt and kill every first-born of man and  
beast. Thus will I execute judgement, I the LORD, against  
13 all the gods of Egypt. And as for you, the blood will be  
a sign on the houses in which you are: when I see the  
blood I will pass over<sup>c</sup> you; the mortal blow shall not  
touch you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 You shall keep this day as a day of remembrance, and  
make it a pilgrim-feast, a festival of the LORD; you shall  
keep it generation after generation as a rule for all time.  
15 For seven days you shall eat unleavened cakes. On the  
very first day you shall rid your houses of leaven; from  
the first day to the seventh anyone who eats leavened

[a] *Lit.* between the two evenings.

[b] *Lit.* your loins girt.

[c] *Or* stand guard over.

bread shall be outlawed<sup>a</sup> from Israel. On the first day there shall be a sacred assembly and on the seventh day there shall be a sacred assembly: on these days no work shall be done, except what must be done to provide food for everyone; and that will be allowed. You shall observe these commandments because this was the very day on which I brought you out of Egypt in your tribal hosts. You shall observe this day from generation to generation as a rule for all time.

You shall eat unleavened cakes in the first month from the evening which begins the fourteenth day until the evening which begins the twenty-first day. For seven days no leaven may be found in your houses, for anyone who eats anything fermented shall be outlawed from the community of Israel, be he foreigner or native. You must eat nothing fermented. Wherever you live you must eat your cakes unleavened.

Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go at once and get sheep for your families and slaughter the Passover. Then take a bunch of marjoram,<sup>b</sup> dip it in the blood in the basin<sup>c</sup> and smear some blood from the basin<sup>d</sup> on the lintel and the two door-posts. Nobody may go out through the door of his house till morning. The LORD will go through Egypt and strike it, but when he sees the blood on the lintel and the two door-posts, he will pass over that door and will not let the destroyer enter your houses to strike you. You shall keep this as a rule for you and your children for all time. When you enter the land which the LORD will give you as he

[a] *Lit.* cut off.[b] *Or* hyssop.[c] *Or* on the threshold.[d] *Or* from the threshold.



26 promised, you shall observe this rite. Then, when your  
27 children ask you, "What is the meaning of this rite?" you  
shall say, "It is the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the  
houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he struck the  
Egyptians but spared our houses." The people bowed  
down and prostrated themselves.

28 The Israelites went and did all that the LORD had com-  
29 manded Moses and Aaron; and by midnight the LORD  
had struck down every first-born in Egypt, from the first-  
born of Pharaoh on his throne to the first-born of the  
30 captive in the dungeon, and the first-born of cattle. Before  
night was over Pharaoh rose, he and all his courtiers and  
all the Egyptians, and a great cry of anguish went up,  
because not a house in Egypt was without its dead.  
31 Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron while it was still  
night and said, 'Up with you! Be off, and leave my  
people, you and your Israelites. Go and worship the LORD,  
32 as you ask; take your sheep and cattle, and go; and ask  
33 God's blessing on me also.' The Egyptians urged on the  
people and hurried them out of the country, 'or else',  
34 they said, 'we shall all be dead.' The people picked up  
their dough before it was leavened, wrapped their  
kneading-troughs in their cloaks, and slung them on their  
35 shoulders. Meanwhile the Israelites had done as Moses had  
told them, asking the Egyptians for jewellery of silver and  
36 gold and for clothing. As the LORD had made the Egyptians  
well-disposed towards them, they let them have what they  
asked; in this way they plundered the Egyptians.

★ Apart from a small nucleus of J material (verses 21-7, 29-34), the present chapter comes from the P source. The Pass-

over proper is described in verses 3-13, 21-33, and the feast of Unleavened Bread in verses 14-20, 34. The Passover refers basically to the lamb or kid slaughtered as a sacrifice (verse 21), and secondarily to the subsequent feast at which this was eaten. Its name (Heb. *pesah*) is explained in terms of God's 'passing over' (Heb. *pāsaḥ*) the houses of the Israelites on which the blood of the lamb had been sprinkled (verse 23). This is a popular interpretation, and certainly does not explain the real origin of the name, which is more likely to have arisen from the special protective rite which was originally associated with the sacrifice. An old nomadic sheep festival, with its rites of blood-sprinkling to ward off evil powers, has been remodelled to serve as a reminder of the event of the exodus. The related festival of Unleavened Bread was originally observed to mark the end of the old season's crop of cereal and the expectation of bread baked with the new season's flour. This is linked to the exodus experience by the explanation that in their hasty departure from Egypt the Israelites had no time to wait until their dough was leavened (verse 34). Thus both celebrations at one time had an earlier significance, which has been entirely overshadowed by the connection with the memory of the exodus.

12: 2. *the first of months*: this was the month Abib, meaning '(barley) ears', referring to the beginning of the barley harvest. The reckoning of Israel's year as beginning in the spring reflects the Babylonian calendar, which was adopted by Israel during the time of the Babylonian exile. Earlier the year had been reckoned as beginning in the autumn.

3. *let each man take*: it is distinctive of Passover that it is a household celebration, not requiring to be performed at a sanctuary. At a later time the Jewish authorities stipulated ten as the minimum number of persons for one Passover sacrifice. Usually, however, the gatherings were very much larger, and the participants ate only a small piece of the sacrificial meat.

6. *between dusk and dark*: the requirement that the slaughtering should take place in the later evening, after sundown, but



before dark, is related to the special nocturnal character of the celebration, and its prominent theme of protection against unseen supernatural danger.

7. *They must take some of the blood*: this was to serve as a sign, showing which houses were inhabited by Israelites and so were to be protected. Behind the practice, however, there certainly lie beliefs in the special potency of blood to ward off evil powers.

8. *they shall eat the flesh roast*: Deut. 16: 7 demands that the Passover be boiled. The practice clearly changed at some time, and probably at one time varied locally.

10. *You shall not leave any of it*: this is a further indication that the festival, in its original form, was especially a nocturnal celebration, in which the moon figured prominently. The moon was probably regarded as the symbol of the presence of the deity, and although the author no longer believes this, the practices behind such a belief are retained.

11. *This is the way*: the signs of haste and readiness for a journey were taken by later rabbis to refer only to the 'Egyptian Passover', and not to need repetition by Israelites every year.

*It is the LORD's Passover*: the description of the sacrificial sheep or kid as a 'Passover' has sometimes been thought to have arisen from the practice of a 'Passover dance' (cp. 2 Sam. 4: 4; 1 Kings 18: 21, 26 where the verb *pāsaḥ* is used for a ritual (limping) dance). However, there is no evidence that the Passover celebrations at any time included such a dance. In Isa. 31: 5 there is a verb *pāsaḥ* meaning 'to stand over (to protect)', and this is more likely to be connected with the origin of the name Passover, which was a festival concerned with divine protection.

12. *and kill every first-born*: cp. Exod. 4: 23 where Israel is God's first-born, so that the Egyptian first-born are killed as a punishment for the refusal to allow Israel to depart. Behind the account of this plague there lies an awareness of the ancient taboo concerning the sacredness of the first-born of men and

animals (cp. Exod. 13: 2, 12-15 and comment there; also Exod. 22: 29-30). These belonged peculiarly to God because the life-force was especially prominent in them. Hence the firstlings of cattle were sacrificed, whilst the first-born of men had to be redeemed.

14. *as a day of remembrance*: the sacramental character of the original Passover sacrifice, as a protection against evil powers, is clear. Increasingly, however, its significance for Israel lay in its power to remind of what took place at the exodus, and how God delivered his people from slavery by it. Cp. 12: 26 for the recounting of the tradition in the family.

15. *For seven days*: at the beginning of barley harvest (cp. the offering of a barley sheaf at this time Lev. 23: 9-14), before the new grain was consecrated and used, all the old leavened meal had to be removed. In token of this, only unleavened cakes were eaten for seven days, after which the new crop could be used.

22. *a bunch of marjoram*: marjoram was a small plant which grew freely (cp. 1 Kings 4: 33) and which had a brush-like head, well adapted for sprinkling.

*on the lintel and the two door-posts*: the doorway was regarded as the most sacred part of the house, and therefore in need of special protection. The prohibition against going outside the house further indicates the original domestic character of the Passover celebration.

23. *the destroyer*: the destroyer is not more precisely defined, but must be related to the destroying angel mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 24: 16; Isa. 37: 36). He appears as the agent of God's work and not as a rival to him.

34. *before it was leavened*: this note is intended to relate the eating of unleavened bread with the exodus event, so that it too, like the Passover, should serve as a reminder of it.

35. *asking the Egyptians for jewellery*: in accordance with the instructions of 3: 21, 22. The action of the Egyptians reflects the attitude of Pharaoh in asking Moses to procure for him the blessing of the God of Israel (verse 32). \*



## *The exodus from Egypt*

After the tenth and final plague Pharaoh is willing to let the Israelites go, even though with characteristic stubbornness he immediately regrets this decision and sends his soldiers in pursuit of them. This provides the setting for the central event of the entire exodus story: the remarkable crossing of the Red Sea, or Sea of Reeds, as it should more precisely be called. Just when the Israelites appeared to be trapped between the sea and the pursuing Egyptians, God made a way for them through the sea which the Egyptians were unable to follow. The near catastrophe became a remarkable triumph, and was to remain in the memory of Israel as the classic example of what the LORD's salvation means. It is God's providential overruling of events to protect those who trust him, and to free them from the unjust oppression of a tyrannical foreign rule. It is therefore related to real events of this world, and to the moral and political conditions of life which prevail within it. The exodus story thus becomes the central example of the way in which the Old Testament conceives of the relationship between God and man. The account is more than a story about Israel's origin, and becomes a witness to Israel's God and his will for men.

After escaping from the Egyptians the Israelites go out into the wilderness towards Mount Sinai where Moses had received his call. There they meet the Midianites, the people to whom Moses was related by marriage, and with whom he had stayed during his exile from Egypt. From these people he is advised to institute a class of officers, or judges, who will assist him in dealing with legal disputes.

## ISRAEL'S DEPARTURE

THE ISRAELITES SET OUT from Rameses on the way <sup>37</sup>  
to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot,  
not counting dependants. And with them too went a <sup>38</sup>  
large company of every kind, and cattle in great numbers,  
both flocks and herds. The dough they had brought from <sup>39</sup>  
Egypt they baked into unleavened cakes, because there  
was no leaven; for they had been driven out of Egypt  
and allowed no time even to get food ready for them-  
selves.

The Israelites had been settled in Egypt for four hundred <sup>40</sup>  
and thirty years. At the end of four hundred and thirty <sup>41</sup>  
years, on this very day, all the tribes of the LORD came  
out of Egypt. This was a night of vigil as the LORD waited <sup>42</sup>  
to bring them out of Egypt. It is the LORD's night; all  
Israelites keep their vigil generation after generation.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: These are the rules <sup>43</sup>  
for the Passover. No foreigner may partake of it; any <sup>44</sup>  
bought slave may eat it if you have circumcised him; no <sup>45</sup>  
stranger or hired man may eat it. Each lamb must be <sup>46</sup>  
eaten inside the one house, and you must not take any of  
the flesh outside the house. You must not break a single  
bone of it. The whole community of Israel shall keep this <sup>47</sup>  
feast. If there are aliens living with you and they are to <sup>48</sup>  
keep the Passover to the LORD, every male of them must  
be circumcised, and then he can take part; he shall rank as  
native-born. No one who is uncircumcised may eat of it.  
The same law shall apply both to the native-born and to <sup>49</sup>  
the alien who is living among you.

The Israelites did all that the LORD had commanded <sup>50</sup>



51 Moses and Aaron; and on this very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt mustered in their tribal hosts.

\* This section consists of brief summary notes restating the fact of Israel's departure from Egypt. After a short note from the J source re-affirming the link between the departure and the eating of unleavened bread (verses 37b-9), most of the remainder comes from P and insists once again on the importance of observing the correct rules for the Passover.

37. *from Rameses on the way to Succoth*: cp. 1: 11. Succoth appears to be a Hebraized version of the Egyptian *Tkw(t)* which was either the same site as, or close to, Pithom.

*six hundred thousand*: cp. Num. 11: 21. The number is broken down more precisely in Num. 1: 46. Even so the number is extraordinarily high for the place and situation and must represent a later exaggerated reflection of the event.

40. *four hundred and thirty years*: cp. Gal. 3: 17. In Gen. 15: 13 the period is described as four hundred years, which is quoted in Acts 7: 6. The chronological reference here comes from P, and is a late calculation, given in very general figures. If the exodus took place about 1230 B.C., this would carry the descent into Egypt back to the seventeenth century B.C., but no chronology of the period can be based on such a figure.

41. *all the tribes*: cp. the comment on 7: 4 for the anachronism of regarding Israel as organized into separate tribes at this period.

43. *No foreigner may partake of it*: a person's foreignness was determined by social allegiance as much as by purely racial considerations. Hence a slave, who would usually be of foreign descent, could share the Passover providing he had been circumcised (verse 44), as also could the alien, who would be a person of foreign origin living permanently among Israelites (verses 47-9). In later Judaism the term 'proselyte' was used for such aliens who had been circumcised and had embraced the Jewish faith. \*

## THE LAW OF THE FIRST-BORN

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'Every first-born, the **13** <sup>1, 2</sup> first birth of every womb among the Israelites, you must dedicate to me, both man and beast; it is mine.'

Then Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day, <sup>3</sup> the day on which you have come out of Egypt, the land of slavery, because the LORD by the strength of his hand has brought you out. No leaven may be eaten this day, for <sup>4</sup> today, in the month of Abib, is the day of your exodus; and when the LORD has brought you into the country of <sup>5</sup> the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites, the land which he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, then you must observe this rite in this same month. For seven days you <sup>6</sup> shall eat unleavened cakes, and on the seventh day there shall be a pilgrim-feast of the LORD. Only unleavened cakes <sup>7</sup> shall be eaten during the seven days; nothing fermented and no leaven shall be seen throughout your territory. On <sup>8</sup> that day you shall tell your son, "This commemorates what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt." You shall have the record of it as a sign upon your hand, <sup>9</sup> and upon your forehead as a reminder, to make sure that the law of the LORD is always on your lips, because the LORD with a strong hand brought you out of Egypt. This <sup>10</sup> is a rule, and you shall keep it at the appointed time from year to year.

'When the LORD has brought you into the land of the <sup>11</sup> Canaanites as he swore to you and to your forefathers, and given it to you, you shall surrender to the LORD the first <sup>12</sup> birth of every womb; and of all first-born offspring of



- 13 your cattle the males belong to the LORD. Every first-born male ass you may redeem with a kid or lamb, but if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. Every first-  
 14 born among your sons you must redeem. When in time to come your son asks you what this means, you shall say to him, "By the strength of his hand the LORD brought  
 15 us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh proved stubborn and refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the first-born in Egypt both man and beast. That is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first birth of every womb if it is a male and redeem every first-born of my sons.  
 16 You shall have the record of it as a sign upon your hand, and upon your forehead as a phylactery, because by the strength of his hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt."

✱ This section comes from the J source and provides some very important insights into the customs and beliefs which related the story of the exodus to the celebration of the Pass-over. Fundamental to the story is the belief that the first-born of both men and animals possessed a special sanctity which made them uniquely the property of God. This special sanctity underlies the story of how only the first-born of the children of the Egyptians were killed by the destroyer, whilst those of Israel were spared (12: 28 ff.). It is appropriate at this point therefore for the narrator to explain in more detail the laws governing the redemption of the first-born children of the Israelites. This included the payment of a special redemption price for their life.

13: 2. *Every first-born . . . you must dedicate to me*: cp. Exod. 22: 29-30. This ancient restriction underlies the account of the final plague upon the Egyptians and explains why that plague only related to the Egyptian first-born. The belief that the first-born of men and animals could only be kept alive by the

payment of a special redemption price to God has been reflected in the tradition of the divine punishment of the Egyptians for refusing to let God's son, Israel, go.

4. *the month of Abib*: cp. on 12: 2. When later the Babylonian names for the months of the year came into use this was the month Nisan.

5. *the country of the Canaanites*: cp. 3: 17 where a similar list is given with the addition of the Perizzites.

9. *as a sign upon your hand*: the annual repetition of the Passover celebration was to have the same value and function as a religious mark tattooed, or branded, upon the hand, and as a sign marked, or worn, upon the forehead.

*that the law of the LORD*: the law referred to here is not a specific code of laws, such as was later given at Mount Sinai, but more generally the instruction about God and Israel's obligation to him which was implicit in Israel's account of its deliverance from Egypt.

12. *you shall surrender to the LORD*: a similar requirement obtained in regard to the firstfruits of crops and harvests (Exod. 22: 29; Deut. 26: 2 ff.). The verb 'surrender' is unusual, and means literally 'to cause to pass over'. It is later used of sacrificing children in fire to Molech (Lev. 18: 21), indicating that this heathen rite was an aberration of this obligation to surrender the first-born to God.

13. *Every first-born male ass*: although the ass was a common domestic animal, it was regarded as ritually unclean, and so unsuitable for sacrifice (cp. Lev. 22: 19). It could therefore be redeemed (i.e. 'bought back' from God) by the substitution of a lamb. Otherwise it had to be killed by having its neck broken.

*Every first-born among your sons*: the redemption price is not definitely fixed, and may at one time have varied according to the father's circumstances. Later, in the time when the P source was composed, it was fixed at 5 shekels a head (Num. 18: 16).

15. *That is why I sacrifice*: as so often in religious matters,



old customs have been retained, but have been explained by new reasons.

16. *You shall have the record of it:* cp. verse 9. The meaning is that, just as the feast of Unleavened Bread served as a sign of Israel's belonging to God, so also would the practice in regard to the first-born.

*as a phylactery:* 'phylactery' comes from a Greek word meaning 'preservatives', and refers to amulets which were worn in order to protect their wearers against demons. Jewish phylacteries (Heb. *tōtāpōt* – headbands) are mentioned again in Deut. 6: 8; 11: 18. In later Judaism phylacteries were, and still are, worn, consisting of small scrolls of parchment with short passages of scripture written on them, and rolled into cases. These are bound with leather to the forehead and left arm. \*

#### THE DIVINE GUIDANCE OF ISRAEL

17 Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not guide them by the road towards the Philistines, although that was the shortest; for he said, 'The people may change their minds when they see war before them, and turn  
18 back to Egypt.' So God made them go round by way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea; and the fifth generation of Israelites departed from Egypt.

19 Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had exacted an oath from the Israelites: 'Some day', he said, 'God will show his care for you, and then, as you go, you must take my bones with you.'

20 They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham on  
21 the edge of the wilderness. And all the time the LORD went before them, by day a pillar of cloud to guide them on their journey, by night a pillar of fire to give them  
22 light, so that they could travel night and day. The pillar

of cloud never left its place in front of the people by day, nor the pillar of fire by night.

\* This section consists of three short notes about the manner of Israel's journeying through the wilderness. The first two come from the E source and describe how Israel entered the land from across the river Jordan in the east, and not by the shorter coastal route through the territory of the Philistines, and also that they carried the bones of Joseph with them. Both are concerned to explain known facts, in the first case that Israel had entered the land from the east, and secondly that, as the burial place of Joseph was revered at Shechem (Josh. 24: 32), his corpse must have been brought from Egypt. The third note (verses 20-2) comes from J, and affirms that throughout the whole period that Israel was in the wilderness God gave to the people a visible sign of his presence in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.

17. *by the road towards the Philistines*: the shortest route connecting Egypt with Canaan is along the north edge of the Suez isthmus, then along the sea coast to Gaza. This, however, was clearly not the route taken by the Israelites, who had travelled much farther east, and had entered Palestine from the east, across the Jordan. The exact route followed by the Israelites is not certainly recoverable, in spite of the fact that the P source gives a detailed itinerary in Num. 33. See further pp. 19-20 for the identification of the location of Mount Sinai. The Philistines were a people who came from the Aegean area by sea and settled in the coastal plain of the land to which they were ultimately to give their name, Palestine. Their main settlements took place around 1200 B.C., which was roughly contemporaneous with the time of the exodus.

18. *the wilderness towards the Red Sea*: the Hebrew words for 'Red Sea' (*yām sūp*) appear basically to mean Sea of Reeds, and to refer to reed-covered swampland. In 1 Kings 9: 26 the phrase is used to refer to the northern arm of the Red Sea, by



the Gulf of Akaba. This is the traditional site of the Israelites' crossing, but one which is probably not authentic. It is probable that the name 'Sea of Reeds' was used for several places, and the most likely site of the Israelite crossing is one of the swamplands of Suez, most probably the Sirbonian Sea. The Gulf of Akaba is more than 120 miles from the region of Goshen, which is much too far for a hasty flight on foot.

21. *the LORD went before them*: the assurance that God's presence accompanied the Israelites throughout their wanderings is a basic theme of the exodus story. The symbols of this presence, a column of cloud by day and of fire by night, probably derive from the appearance of an active volcano, at which the fire and cloud originally appeared. The only volcanic region, however, lies in a desolate part of north-west Arabia, and to locate Mount Sinai here, as several scholars have suggested, is so far distant from the delta region of Egypt, as to render such an identification improbable. More plausibly the pillar of cloud and fire had already come to be regarded by Hebrews familiar with the desert region as traditional symbols of a divine presence, without their being derived specifically from Mount Sinai. They derive either from knowledge of a volcano, regarded as the home of a deity, or from the smoke of sacrifice ascending at a sanctuary. \*

#### THE EGYPTIAN PURSUIT OF ISRAEL

- 14<sup>1,2</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'Speak to the Israelites: they are to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth,<sup>a</sup> between Migdol and the sea to the east of Baal-zephon; <sup>3</sup> your camp shall be opposite, by the sea. Pharaoh will then think that the Israelites are finding themselves in difficult country, and are hemmed in by the wilderness. <sup>4</sup> I will make Pharaoh obstinate, and he will pursue them, so that I may win glory for myself at the expense of

[a] Or where the desert tracks begin.

Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.' The Israelites did as they were bidden.

When the king of Egypt was told that the Israelites had slipped away, he and his courtiers changed their minds completely, and said, 'What have we done? We have let our Israelite slaves go free!' So Pharaoh put horses to his chariot, and took his troops with him. He took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt, with a commander in each. Then Pharaoh king of Egypt, made obstinate by the LORD, pursued the Israelites as they marched defiantly away. The Egyptians, all Pharaoh's chariots and horses, cavalry and infantry, pursued them and overtook them encamped beside the sea by Pihahiroth to the east of Baal-zephon. Pharaoh was almost upon them when the Israelites looked up and saw the Egyptians close behind. In their terror they clamoured to the LORD for help and said to Moses, 'Were there no graves in Egypt, that you should have brought us here to die in the wilderness? See what you have done to us by bringing us out of Egypt! Is not this just what we meant when we said in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us be slaves to the Egyptians"? We would rather be slaves to the Egyptians than die here in the wilderness.' 'Have no fear,' Moses answered; 'stand firm and see the deliverance that the LORD will bring you this day; for as sure as you see the Egyptians now, you will never see them again. The LORD will fight for you; so hold your peace.'

The LORD said to Moses, 'What is the meaning of this clamour? Tell the Israelites to strike camp. And you shall raise high your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea and cleave it in two, so that the Israelites can pass



17 through the sea on dry ground. For my part I will make the Egyptians obstinate and they will come after you; thus will I win glory for myself at the expense of Pharaoh and  
18 his army, chariots and cavalry all together. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I win glory for myself at the expense of their Pharaoh, his chariots and cavalry.'

\* Even after the final plague and the release of the Israelites from Egypt, Pharaoh again changes his mind and regrets his decision to let them go. He remains incurably obstinate. The result is a futile pursuit, and a final and complete humiliation of the Egyptians in that, in spite of their cavalry and chariotry, they are unable to prevent the Israelites from escaping. Yet it is no skill or courage of the Israelites that achieves this, but the direct action of God. Thus the mysterious obstinacy of Pharaoh, and even the vain chase after Israel into the desert, are all made to serve God's purpose in compelling the Egyptians to recognize that he is the LORD (verse 18), and that glory belongs to him alone. The Israelites' escape is thereby interpreted to reveal the presence and activity of God. All three sources, J, E and P, are represented, although the latter predominates.

14: 2. *before Pi-hahiroth*: neither the site of Pi-hahiroth nor Migdol can be certainly identified. Baal-zephon was the site of a sanctuary at what is now the uninhabited location *maham-madije*, on the western end of the strip of land separating the Mediterranean from the Sirbonian Sea (now *sebhat berdāwil*). The mention of this place supports the view that the original Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) was in fact the Sirbonian Sea.

5. *the Israelites had slipped away*: i.e. they had left Egypt for good, and had not merely gone on a temporary pilgrimage into the wilderness. This change of Pharaoh's mind, however, was no ordinary indignation at being tricked, but was the consequence of God's hardening of his heart. All Pharaoh's attempts to stop the departure of the Israelites only served to

reveal his own powerlessness before the LORD, and the emptiness of the gods of Egypt.

6. *So Pharaoh put horses to his chariot*: the Egyptian use of chariots and horses for military purposes made a striking impression on the Israelites, who did not begin to equip their own army in this way until the age of Solomon. Thus the failure of such well-equipped Egyptians to recapture the Israelites still further emphasized the superior power of Israel's God.

7. *with a commander in each*: the Hebrew word (*shālīsh*), used here for 'commander', denotes some kind of superior military officer.

11. *Were there no graves in Egypt...?*: a bitterly ironical question since, in ancient, as in modern, times, Egypt was widely famed for the pyramids, the gigantic tombs of the Pharaohs. When faced with serious danger even the Israelites cried out in terror and unbelief. In this way the subsequent deliverance reflects glory solely upon God, who alone brings triumph out of threatened disaster.

14. *The LORD will fight for you*: it was a basic feature of Israel's understanding of war that it was a sacred activity in which God participated. Primarily such 'holy' wars were defensive, although not exclusively so, and required special regulations to ensure the proper dedication of Israel's soldiers, and to ensure that all credit for the victory was accorded to God, to whom all the spoil was devoted. God fought for Israel by using the forces of nature to assist his people, and by instilling panic in the enemy. Cp. Exod. 17: 8-16; Josh. 10: 12-13; Judg. 5: 19-23.

16. *And you shall raise high your staff*: as in the earlier plagues brought upon Egypt, the divine action is signalled by Moses' use of his staff.

*stretch out your hand*: the picture of the sea being divided into two, to form a wall on either side of the Israelites, is a mark of P. For the less spectacular, but undoubtedly more historical, description of J, see verse 21. \*



## ISRAEL'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

- 19 The angel of God, who had kept in front of the Israelites, moved away to the rear. The pillar of cloud moved from  
20 the front and took its place behind them and so came between the Egyptians and the Israelites. And the cloud brought on darkness and early nightfall, so that contact was lost throughout the night.
- 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea away all night with a strong east wind and turned the sea-bed into dry land. The waters were  
22 torn apart, and the Israelites went through the sea on the dry ground, while the waters made a wall for them to  
23 right and to left. The Egyptians went in pursuit of them far into the sea, all Pharaoh's horse, his chariots, and his  
24 cavalry. In the morning watch the LORD looked down on the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud,  
25 and he threw them into a panic. He clogged<sup>a</sup> their chariot wheels and made them lumber along heavily, so that the Egyptians said, 'It is the LORD fighting for Israel against  
26 Egypt; let us flee.' Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, and let the water flow back  
27 over the Egyptians, their chariots and their cavalry.' So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at day-break the water returned to its accustomed place; but the Egyptians were in flight as it advanced, and the LORD  
28 swept them out<sup>b</sup> into the sea. The water flowed back and covered all Pharaoh's army, the chariots and the cavalry, which had pressed the pursuit into the sea. Not one man  
29 was left alive. Meanwhile the Israelites had passed along

[a] *So Sam.; Heb.* took away.[b] *Lit.* shook them off.

the dry ground through the sea, with the water making a wall for them to right and to left. That day the LORD<sup>30</sup> saved Israel from the power of Egypt, and the Israelites saw the Egyptians lying dead on the sea-shore. When<sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great power which the LORD had put forth against Egypt, all the people feared the LORD, and they put their faith in him and in Moses his servant.

\* This narrative, which is woven together from both J and P sources, provides the climax to the whole account of the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt and their deliverance by the LORD. The final escape was achieved by the flight of the Israelites across the marshy sea, where the Egyptians could not follow them. Instead the heavy Egyptian chariots and cavalry became clogged in the mud. The 'miracle' wrought by God consisted in the driving back of the sea by a strong east wind (verse 21), although later reflection on this has heightened the picture to portray two walls of water, leaving a dry path for the Israelites between them (verse 22). Essentially the 'miraculous' element consisted in the providential timing of a natural event to aid Israel, rather than in any suspension of the laws of the natural order.

19. *The angel of God*: this is a reference to the pillar of cloud and fire which had led the Israelites on their way into the wilderness, and which symbolized the presence of God. The title 'angel' means messenger, and is used here to preserve the idea of God's heavenly reality, whilst affirming that his presence is with Israel. We should not, therefore, think of a supreme angelic leader, separate from God, but rather of God himself as he made himself known to men.

20. *And the cloud brought on darkness*: cp. Josh. 24: 7. The Hebrew text is obscure, reading 'and it lit up the night', so that the translation rests on an emendation required by the context. The cloud of God's presence became a screen hiding and protecting the Israelites.



21. *and the LORD drove the sea away*: this is the oldest account of what happened at the crossing of the sea. If the location was the Sirbonian Sea then it is intelligible that the action of wind and tide on the shallow swamplands would leave a passage which the Israelites could ford, whilst the heavier horses and chariots of the Egyptians would be unable to pass over the water-soaked ground.

22. *while the waters made a wall*: cp. 15: 8, where a similar description is to be found. It appears that the poetic exaggeration has led to its acceptance by the P author as a literal statement of fact.

24. *the LORD looked down*: the close identity of God with the pillar of fire and cloud is evident, showing that the 'angel of God' was really a form of God himself.

26. *and let the water flow back*: if the event was located at the Sirbonian Sea, this would find its explanation in the incoming tide, which raced swiftly over the low-lying mudflats, trapping the Egyptian chariots and horsemen.

31. *all the people feared the LORD*: the true climax of the event was that both Israel and the Egyptians should know that the LORD is God. Faith in God, and in Moses as his servant, is the proper response to what has happened, which amounts to a revelation of God through his works. \*

#### A SONG OF THANKSGIVING

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

I will sing to the LORD, for he has risen up in triumph;  
the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea.

- 2 The LORD is my refuge and my defence,  
he has shown himself my deliverer.  
He is my God, and I will glorify him;  
he is my father's God, and I will exalt him.

- The LORD is a warrior: the LORD is his name. 3  
The chariots of Pharaoh and his army 4  
he has cast into the sea;  
the flower of his officers  
are engulfed in the Red Sea.  
The watery abyss has covered them, 5  
they sank into the depths like a stone.  
Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in strength: 6  
thy right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.  
In the fullness of thy triumph 7  
thou didst cast the rebels down:  
thou didst let loose thy fury;  
it consumed them like chaff.  
At the blast of thy anger the sea piled up: 8  
the waters stood up like a bank:  
out at sea the great deep congealed.  
The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake; 9  
I will divide the spoil,  
I will glut my appetite upon them;  
I will draw my sword,  
I will rid myself of them.'  
Thou didst blow with thy blast; the sea covered them. 10  
They sank like lead in the swelling waves.  
Who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods<sup>a</sup>? 11  
Who is like thee, majestic in holiness,  
worthy of awe and praise, who workest wonders?  
Thou didst stretch out thy right hand, 12  
earth engulfed them.  
In thy constant love thou hast led the people 13  
whom thou didst ransom:

[a] *Or in might.*



- thou hast guided them by thy strength  
to thy holy dwelling-place.
- 14 Nations heard and trembled;  
agony seized the dwellers in Philistia.
- 15 Then the chieftains of Edom were dismayed,  
trembling seized the leaders of Moab,  
all the inhabitants of Canaan were in turmoil;  
16 terror and dread fell upon them:  
through the might of thy arm they stayed stone-still,  
while thy people passed, O LORD,  
while the people whom thou madest thy own<sup>a</sup> passed by.
- 17 Thou broughtest them in and didst plant them  
in the mount that is thy possession,  
the dwelling-place, O LORD, of thy own making,  
the sanctuary, O LORD, which thy own hands prepared.
- 18 The LORD shall reign for ever and for ever.
- 19 For Pharaoh's horse, both chariots and cavalry, went  
into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters over  
them, but Israel had passed through the sea on dry ground.
- 20 And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took up her  
tambourine, and all the women followed her, dancing  
21 to the sound of tambourines; and Miriam sang them this  
refrain:
- Sing to the LORD, for he has risen up in triumph;  
the horse and his rider he has hurled into the sea.

\* This triumphal song of thanksgiving for the deliverance at the Red Sea is certainly the oldest written record of the event which the Old Testament has preserved. It is usually ascribed to the J source, but the song itself is undoubtedly older than

[a] madest thy own: or didst create.

the source, and has simply been incorporated into it. In verses 13-17 it surveys briefly the period of the settlement and conquest, so that it cannot be contemporary with the event of the exodus itself, but must have been composed after Israel's settlement in Canaan. The mention of God's 'dwelling-place' in verses 13 and 17 probably refers to Jerusalem, indicating a time after David had captured this city.

15: 1. *Then Moses and the Israelites sang*: verses 20-1 ascribe the opening refrain to Miriam, so the inference that the 'I' who speaks is Moses is secondary. Almost certainly the song was composed to be sung by the worshipping community, but it is modelled upon hymns celebrating a military victory, the singing of which would have been led by women in greeting the returning soldiers; cp. 1 Sam. 18: 6-7.

3. *The LORD is a warrior*: this idea was basic to Israel's belief that when a 'holy' war was declared God himself came to their assistance.

4. *he has cast into the sea*: the vigour of the language (literally 'flung into the sea') emphasizes especially God's control over the waters in which the Egyptians were drowned.

5. *The watery abyss*: this lends a mythological note to the description of the sea, identifying the waters which drowned the Egyptians with the waters of the underworld, which were subdued at creation, but the demonic force of which had constantly to be kept in check by God. Cp. Gen. 1: 2; Ps. 104: 7.

8. *At the blast of thy anger*: the blast of God's anger gives a personal colouring to the strong east wind which drove back the tidal waters of the sea. The picture of the waters forming a bank on each side is a poetic hyperbole, which was later taken up literally into the historical narrative.

*the great deep congealed*: a reference to the drying up of the sea bed, which is couched in semi-mythological language, suggesting that the deep was like a dragon curling itself up.

11. *Who is like thee...?*: such a question indicates a belief in many gods with whom the LORD could be compared. This



rhetorical question, however, affirmed that the LORD was incomparable among all other gods and heavenly beings, and this is the fundamental belief out of which a true and lasting monotheism arose.

12. *earth engulfed them*: a reference to the sinking of the Egyptians in the sea, which is described as the earth swallowing them up.

13. *whom thou didst ransom*: the phrase literally refers to the freeing of slaves by payment of their purchase price. Here it is used metaphorically to describe God's action in securing the release of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt.

*to thy holy dwelling-place*: the word 'dwelling-place' (Heb. *nāweh*) basically means a 'pasturage, settlement'. In 2 Sam. 15: 25 'the dwelling-place of the LORD' is the Jerusalem sanctuary. Probably this is the intended reference here, although it is possible to take it more widely to refer to the whole land of Palestine.

14. *Nations heard and trembled*: the alarm of the Philistines, Edomites, Moabites and Canaanites was because their claims on Palestinian soil would be checked and threatened by the migration there of the Israelites from Egypt. The poet thus looks ahead to the sequel of the exodus in Israel's settlement in Canaan, which, from the time at which he wrote, was already an accomplished fact.

16. *whom thou madest thy own*: God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt was an act of election by which he affirmed his lordship over them in a unique way. Thus God's action in delivering the Israelites points forward naturally to the covenant of Sinai by which a formal expression was given to this special relationship between the LORD and Israel.

17. *the mount that is thy possession*: a further reference to God's sanctuary on Mount Zion, which was regarded as his special abode. This is a further indication, therefore, that this song was composed after David's conquest of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5: 6-10).

18. *The LORD shall reign*: this liturgical refrain is found again in several psalms (Ps. 93: 1; 96: 10 etc.), and suggests that this victory hymn was intended to be used in worship.

20. *Miriam the prophetess*: the title of prophetess indicates that Miriam possessed the gift of ecstatic speech. Such 'prophecies' could be of many kinds, including songs and chants, which would not necessarily contain predictions. Her action here reflects the ancient custom of women going out to meet returning warriors, and welcoming them with songs of triumph. \*

#### THE VENTURE INTO THE WILDERNESS

Moses led Israel from the Red Sea out into the wilderness<sup>22</sup> of Shur. For three days they travelled through the wilderness without finding water. They came to Marah, but<sup>23</sup> could not drink the Marah water because it was bitter; that is why the place was called Marah. The people com-<sup>24</sup>plained to Moses and asked, 'What are we to drink?' Moses cried to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a log<sup>25</sup> which he threw into the water, and then the water became sweet.

It was there that the LORD laid down a precept and rule of life; there he put them to the test. He said, 'If only you<sup>26</sup> will obey the LORD your God, if you will do what is right in his eyes, if you will listen to his commands and keep all his statutes, then I will never bring upon you any of the sufferings which I brought on the Egyptians; for I the LORD am your healer.'

They came to Elim, where there were twelve springs<sup>27</sup> and seventy palm-trees, and there they encamped beside the water.



\* With this section we begin the story of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, which is found in Exod. 16-18; Num. 1-36. This wandering is interrupted by the account of God's revelation at Sinai (Exod. 19-40).

From the religious point of view this period spent in the wilderness serves to illustrate two fundamental truths: man's innate tendency to unbelief, and God's ability to provide, if need be miraculously, sufficient for man's need. The first is shown by Israel's repeated complaints against Moses (cp. Ps. 95: 7-11; 106: 13-33) and the second by the provision of unexpected supplies of food (cp. Ps. 105: 40-2). The wilderness tradition in general therefore serves to warn Israel against the ingratitude and absurdity of unbelief.

Immediately after venturing into the wilderness, Israel is faced with the problem of water supply, and the need for wells of drinking water. In the soil of the region, with its heavy salt deposits, many wells and waterholes are unusable because of the 'bitterness' of the water. The present narrative shows God's power to remedy this defect by Moses' throwing a log into the well. Before this takes place, however, the Israelites reveal their underlying unbelief in a startling and deplorable way.

22. *the wilderness of Shur*: for the location cp. Gen: 25. 18; 1 Sam. 15: 7; 27: 8. It was situated close to the border of Egypt, but exactly where is no longer known. The name means 'wall' in Aramaic, and perhaps at one time referred to a line of military fortifications.

23. *They came to Marah*: the name means 'bitter', but the precise location of the well is not known.

24. *The people complained to Moses*: cp. 16: 2, 7, 8; 17: 3; Num. 14: 2 ff.; 16: 11, 41; 17: 5 for further examples of such complaining. Such ungrateful and illogical behaviour in view of God's deliverance illustrates the fundamental biblical conception of sin as human rebellion against God and forgetfulness of his past gifts.

25. *showed him a log*: there is no obvious explanation to

show why the branch of a tree should remove the bitterness of the water. The unusual fact of finding a 'sweet' water well in the vicinity, where other waterholes were 'bitter' as the place name indicates, may have been sufficient to give rise to the story. We may compare 2 Kings 2: 19-22 for a comparable semi-magical act.

*he put them to the test*: this is an allusion to the place-name Massah ('testing', 'challenge') which was another waterhole of the region, where the Israelites put God to the test, because of their lack of faith in him (17: 7).

26. *for I the LORD am your healer*: cp. Ps. 103: 3. The reference is to the divine removal of the bitter taste of the water, which had thereby been 'healed'.

27. *They came to Elim*: an oasis of unknown locality. The name means 'terebinth-trees', which were commonly regarded as sacred; cp. Gen. 12: 6. \*

#### THE GIFT OF THE QUAILS AND THE MANNA

The whole community of the Israelites set out from Elim 16 and came into the wilderness of Sin, which lies between Elim and Sinai. This was on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left Egypt.

The Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron in the 2 wilderness and said, 'If only we had died at the LORD's 3 hand in Egypt, where we sat round the fleshpots and had plenty of bread to eat! But you have brought us out into this wilderness to let this whole assembly starve to death.' The LORD said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from 4 heaven for you. Each day the people shall go out and gather a day's supply, so that I can put them to the test and see whether they will follow my instructions or not. But 5 on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it shall be twice as much as they have gathered on other



- 6 days.' Moses and Aaron then said to all the Israelites, 'In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heeded your complaints against him; it is not against us that you bring your complaints; we are nothing.' 'You shall know this', Moses said, 'when the LORD, in answer to your complaints, gives you flesh to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread in plenty. What are we? It is against the LORD that you bring your complaints, and not against us.'
- 9 Moses told Aaron to say to the whole community of Israel, 'Come into the presence of the LORD, for he has heeded your complaints.' While Aaron was speaking to the community of the Israelites, they looked towards the wilderness, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud. The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Say to them, "Between dusk and dark you will have flesh to eat and in the morning bread in plenty. You shall know that I the LORD am your God."'
- 13 That evening a flock of quails flew in and settled all over the camp, and in the morning a fall of dew lay all around it. When the dew was gone, there in the wilderness, fine flakes appeared, fine as hoar-frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is that?',<sup>a</sup> because they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'That is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. This is the command the LORD has given: "Each of you is to gather as much as he can eat: let every man take an omer a head for every person in his tent."'

[a] *Heb. man-hu (cp. verse 31).*

The Israelites did this, and they gathered, some more, <sup>17</sup> some less, but when they measured it by the omer, those <sup>18</sup> who had gathered more had not too much, and those who had gathered less had not too little. Each had just as much as he could eat. Moses said, 'No one may keep any <sup>19</sup> of it till morning.' Some, however, did not listen to <sup>20</sup> Moses; they kept part of it till morning, and it became full of maggots and stank, and Moses was angry with them. Each morning every man gathered as much as he <sup>21</sup> could eat, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two <sup>22</sup> omers each. All the chiefs of the community came and told Moses. 'This', he answered, 'is what the LORD has <sup>23</sup> said: "Tomorrow is a day of sacred rest, a sabbath holy to the LORD." So bake what you want to bake now, and boil what you want to boil; put aside what remains over and keep it safe till morning.' So they put it aside till <sup>24</sup> morning as Moses had commanded, and it did not stink, nor did maggots appear in it. 'Eat it today,' said <sup>25</sup> Moses, 'because today is a sabbath of the LORD. Today you will find none outside. For six days you may gather <sup>26</sup> it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.'

Some of the people did go out to gather it on the seventh <sup>27</sup> day, but they found none. The LORD said to Moses, 'How <sup>28</sup> long will you refuse to obey my commands and instructions? The LORD has given you the sabbath, and so he <sup>29</sup> gives you two days' food every sixth day. Let each man stay where he is; no one may stir from his home on the seventh day.' And the people kept the sabbath on the <sup>30</sup> seventh day.



- 31 Israel called the food manna; it was white, like coriander seed, and it tasted like a wafer made with honey.
- 32 'This', said Moses, 'is the command which the LORD has given: "Take a full omer of it to be kept for future generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of
- 33 Egypt."' So Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar and fill it with an omer of manna, and store it in the presence of
- 34 the Lord to be kept for future generations.' Aaron did as the LORD had commanded Moses, and stored it before
- 35 the Testimony for safe keeping. The Israelites ate the manna for forty years until they came to a land where they could settle; they ate it until they came to the border
- 36 of Canaan. (An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

\* The story of the divine gift of quails and manna to Israel serves to illustrate the nature of God's providence from the features of desert life. The narrative is almost entirely from P, with a short extract from J. J's account of the gift of quails is found in Num. 11: 4 ff., where it comes after the revelation at Sinai. Here the manna and quails are dealt with together because they both illustrate the same truth of divine care.

16: 1. *the wilderness of Sin*: the actual location is not certainly identifiable. Although the name is similar to that of Sinai, the two regions are not identical.

3. *If only we had died*: the Israelites' complaint is absurd and illogical, since the food of the labour gangs in Egypt must have been very meagre. The author, however, clearly wishes to stress the foolishness and ingratitude of the complaint as a typically human reaction towards God.

4. *I will rain down*: cp. Ps. 78: 24 f. The reference to the double supply on the sixth day anticipates the fuller account of this in verses 22 ff.

12. *You shall know*: for this recognition formula see on 6: 7.

God's actions disclose to men, both believing and unbelieving, that he is the supreme lord of man's life and world.

13. *a flock of quails flew in*: quails are migratory birds of the partridge family. They generally fly with the wind, migrating northwards from Arabia and Africa to southern Europe in the spring, and returning in September. On such long flights, large flocks of them come to earth exhausted at night, so that they can easily be caught by hand.

14. *When the dew was gone*: this is a reference to the manna which, like the quails, marked an unexpected feature of desert life. It is still known in the inland area of the Sinai peninsula, and is still called *mann* by the Arabs of the region. It is a drop-like substance formed from the excretions of an insect living on the trees and shrubs of the region, especially the tamarisk tree. It falls from the leaves of the tree on to the ground, and hardens in the cool night air.

15. *they said to one another, 'What is that?'*: the Hebrew *man-hu* (see N.E.B. footnote and cp. verse 31) is intended as an explanation of the name 'manna' (Heb. *man*). This is not the actual origin of the name, but has arisen simply from the similar sound of the two expressions.

16. *an omer a head*: the omer was a clay tub, or pot, which measured one tenth of an ephah. On the basis of the note in verse 36, it may be reckoned to have contained about 4 litres.

18. *those who had gathered more*: everyone gathered roughly according to the size of his family, but when they came to measure more exactly they found that each had gathered exactly an omer a head. The incident is referred to in 2 Cor. 8: 15 as illustrative of the spiritual principle that each should give according to his ability, and may expect to receive according to his need.

21. *when the sun grew hot*: because it has a low melting point manna easily melts in the daytime heat, making it difficult to keep. It is therefore necessary to eat what has been collected on the same day.

22. *On the sixth day*: in spite of the need for consuming each



day's supply promptly there was to be an exception of the normal rule in order to enable the Israelites to keep the sabbath.

23. *a sabbath holy to the LORD*: the sabbath is mentioned here in anticipation of the law demanding its observance given in 20: 8-11. For the history of the observance of such a day, see the comment there. It is characteristic of the P source to place great emphasis upon keeping the sabbath. The tradition that the supply of manna only lasted for the day on which it was gathered was felt to require this further note that the sabbath made an exception to this rule. In accordance with this it is claimed that even the normal process of decay did not apply to the manna on the sabbath day, because the sabbath was fundamental to the whole order of creation (Gen. 2: 2-3).

27. *Some of the people*: no punishment, except a stern admonition, is given to those who broke God's command here. In Num. 15: 32-6 more serious punishment is inflicted on a man found gathering sticks on the sabbath, and he is stoned to death.

31. *like coriander seed*: coriander is a plant which grows freely in Egypt and Palestine, producing a greyish-white edible seed with a pleasant spicy flavour.

34. *before the Testimony*: the Testimony was the Ark, or chest, of the sanctuary, which, according to P, was to contain the Testimony of the Ten Commandments (25: 16 etc.). Since the instructions for making the Ark have not been given, the reference to it here is made with extreme brevity. \*

#### WATER FROM THE ROCK

- 17 The whole community of Israel set out from the wilderness of Sin and travelled by stages as the LORD told them. They encamped at Rephidim, where there was no water  
 2 for the people to drink, and a dispute arose between them and Moses. When they said, 'Give us water to drink',

Moses said, 'Why do you dispute with me? Why do you challenge the LORD?' There the people became so <sup>3</sup> thirsty that they raised an outcry against Moses: 'Why have you brought us out of Egypt with our children and our herds to let us all die of thirst?' Moses cried to the <sup>4</sup> LORD, 'What shall I do with these people? In a moment they will be stoning me.' The LORD answered, 'Go for- <sup>5</sup> ward ahead of the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel and the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. You will find me waiting for you there, by <sup>6</sup> a rock in Horeb. Strike the rock; water will pour out of it, and the people shall drink.' Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah<sup>a</sup> <sup>7</sup> and Meribah,<sup>b</sup> because the Israelites had disputed with him and challenged the LORD with their question, 'Is the LORD in our midst or not?'

\* After an initial note about the progress of the Israelites on their journey and their encampment at Rephidim, which comes from P, a further example of God's gift of water is recorded. This is woven together from J and E material and locates the event at Massah and Meribah, two separate locations which have here become linked together. The names mean 'challenge' or 'testing' and 'dispute', and are used to point to Israel's disputing with Moses and challenging God's care for them. Once again the strange and threatening conditions of life in the desert prove too great for the feeble faith of the Israelites (cp. the warning to later generations from this in Ps. 95: 7-11). Nevertheless God is able to vindicate his promise that he will be with Israel, and to overcome their unbelief by a further demonstration of his providence.

17: 1. *They encamped at Rephidim: the geographical identifi-*

[a] *That is Challenge.*

[b] *That is Dispute.*



cation of the place of encampment is uncertain. Possibly it refers to a site on the east coast of the Gulf of Akaba, the mountain ridge now called *er-rafid*, although this is very distant from the region of Goshen.

2. *and a dispute arose*: the verb 'to dispute' means 'to take legal action', and explains the origin of the name Meribah, which is given in verse 7. The story is intended to explain how the name arose by linking it with Israel's rebelliousness. Similarly the word 'challenge' or 'test' ('*Why do you challenge the LORD?*') is connected with the name Massah.

6. *by a rock in Horeb*: Horeb is the alternative name for Sinai, whereas the itinerary presupposes that Israel is still some way from the sacred mountain.

*Strike the rock*: the presence of a spring of water gushing out of the rock in a desert oasis was so unexpected a feature that it is credited to the special action of Moses.

7. *Massah and Meribah*: the places probably originally received their names from the use by local bedouin of the oases as places at which legal disputes could be heard and settled, Massah indicating a trial by testing, and Meribah a more normal trial by argument. The explanations of their origin given here reflect a particular adaptation to Israel's recollection of its life in the wilderness. \*

#### THE DEFEAT OF THE AMALEKITES

- 8 The Amalekites came and attacked Israel at Rephidim.  
 9 Moses said to Joshua, 'Pick your men, and march out tomorrow to fight for us against Amalek; and I will take my stand on the hill-top with the staff of God in my  
 10 hand.' Joshua carried out his orders and fought against Amalek while Moses, Aaron and Hur climbed to the top  
 11 of the hill. Whenever Moses raised his hands Israel had the advantage, and when he lowered his hands Amalek  
 12 had the advantage. But when his arms grew heavy they

took a stone and put it under him and, as he sat, Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on each side, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. Thus Joshua defeated <sup>13</sup> Amalek and put its people to the sword.

The LORD said to Moses, 'Record this in writing, and <sup>14</sup> tell it to Joshua in these words: "I am resolved to blot out all memory of Amalek from under heaven."' Moses <sup>15</sup> built an altar, and named it Jehovah-nissi and said, 'My <sup>16</sup> oath upon it:<sup>a</sup> the LORD is at war with Amalek generation after generation.'

\* The Amalekites, who appear here as the enemy of the Israelites, were a tough and aggressive bedouin people who roamed the desert region of Sinai. Their nomadic existence led them to despise the settled and half-settled peoples who dwelt on the fringes of the desert, as the Israelites did. They thus robbed and harassed them, making themselves a serious threat to caravans and communities moving through the desert. In the age of David and Saul the Israelites living in the south of Judah were still troubled by the marauding raids of these Amalekites (1 Sam. 15; 27: 8; 30: 1 ff.) so that the Israelites and Amalekites were regarded as in a permanent state of war (cp. Exod. 17: 16).

Against such an enemy the help of God, which is here mediated by Moses, was necessary.

9. *Moses said to Joshua*: Joshua appears without introduction here as the second-in-command of the Israelites, whose presence was made necessary by the special part he played as the leader of Israel's army.

10. *Moses, Aaron and Hur*: Hur appears unexpectedly here with no clear explanation as to his identity or position.

11. *Whenever Moses raised his hands*: Moses' action is neither a signal, nor a gesture of prayer. Rather the divine power

[a] So Sam.; lit. Hand upon buttock; Heb. unintelligible.



which gives victory was believed to flow through him, and to be effective when his arms were raised.

12. *they took a stone*: the site of the battlefield was remembered, and the particular stone, which probably resembled a throne or a stool, would have been pointed out to later travellers.

14. *Record this in writing*: this instruction is unusual in the early traditions of Israel. Israel at one time possessed a 'Book of the Wars of the LORD' (Num. 21: 14), and it may have been here that records of this and other battle victories were recorded to serve as an encouragement to later generations of Israelites, and as a permanent testimony to the 'acts of God'.

15. *and named it Jehovah-nissi*: the name means 'the LORD is my banner', and arose from the use in Israel of military standards bearing some sign or insignia of God's presence and leadership in battle. Altars often received special names (cp. Gen. 33: 20; Judg. 6: 24), and in this case it is likely that the standards were consecrated at it.

16. *My oath upon it*: the Hebrew is very obscure; either 'a hand upon the banner of Yah', or 'a hand upon the throne of Yah', is possible. It indicates a ceremonial oath of consecration to the LORD as one of his warriors.

*the LORD is at war with Amalek*: because of the fierceness and cruelty of the Amalekites, and the bitterness this created in Israel, no peace treaties of any kind were to be made with them. Israel regarded itself as in a perpetual state of war with them wherever they appeared. \*

#### THE MEETING WITH THE MIDIANITES

- 18 Jethro priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moses, heard all that God had done for Moses and Israel his people, and  
 2 how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. When  
 Moses had dismissed his wife Zipporah, Jethro his father-  
 3 in-law had received her and her two sons. The name of

the one was Gershom, 'for', said Moses, 'I have become an alien<sup>a</sup> living in a foreign land'; the other's name was 4 Eliezer,<sup>b</sup> 'for', he said, 'the God of my father was my help and saved me from Pharaoh's sword.'

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, now came to him with his 5 sons and his wife, to the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. Moses was told, 'Here<sup>c</sup> 6 is Jethro, your father-in-law, coming to you with your wife and her two sons.' Moses went out to meet his 7 father-in-law, bowed low to him and kissed him, and they greeted one another. When they came into the tent Moses 8 told him all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt for Israel's sake, and about all their hardships on the journey, and how the LORD had saved them. Jethro, 9 rejoiced at all the good the LORD had done for Israel in saving them from the power of Egypt. He said, 'Blessed 10 be the LORD who has saved you from the power of Egypt and of Pharaoh. Now I know that the LORD is the greatest 11 of all gods, because he has delivered the people from the power of the Egyptians who dealt so arrogantly with them.' Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a whole- 12 offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came and shared the meal with Jethro in the presence of God.

The next day Moses took his seat to settle disputes 13 among the people, and they were standing round him from morning till evening. When Jethro saw all that he 14 was doing for the people, he said, 'What are you doing for all these people? Why do you sit alone with all of them standing round you from morning till evening?'

[a] Cp. 2: 22. [b] *That is God my help.* [c] *So Sept.; Heb. I.*



15 'The people come to me', Moses answered, 'to seek God's  
16 guidance. Whenever there is a dispute among them, they  
come to me, and I decide between man and man. I declare  
17 the statutes and laws of God.' But his father-in-law said to  
18 Moses, 'This is not the best way to do it. You will only  
wear yourself out and wear out all the people who are  
here. The task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it by  
19 yourself. Now listen to me: take my advice, and God be  
with you. It is for you to be the people's representative  
20 before God, and bring their disputes to him. You must  
instruct them in the statutes and laws, and teach them how  
21 they must behave and what they must do. But you must  
yourself search for capable, God-fearing men among all  
the people, honest and incorruptible men, and appoint  
them over the people as officers over units of a thousand,  
22 of a hundred, of fifty or of ten. They shall sit as a perma-  
nent court for the people; they must refer difficult cases  
to you but decide simple cases themselves. In this way  
your burden will be lightened, and they will share it with  
23 you. If you do this, God will give you strength, and you  
will be able to go on. And, moreover, this whole people  
24 will here and now regain peace and harmony.' Moses  
listened to his father-in-law and did all he had suggested.  
25 He chose capable men from all Israel and appointed them  
leaders of the people, officers over units of a thousand,  
26 of a hundred, of fifty or of ten. They sat as a permanent  
court, bringing the difficult cases to Moses but deciding  
27 simple cases themselves. Moses set his father-in-law on his  
way, and he went back to his own country.

\* This chapter describes a meeting in the wilderness between Moses and his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. It comes from E, although some additions have been made to the original narrative to accommodate it into the more extended history of the period. The scene is the mountain of God, which is not precisely named, but which is clearly intended as a reference to Horeb-Sinai. The incident stands by itself, and is not related to the much fuller account of what happened at Sinai which is told in Exod. 19-40.

As a result of the reunion with his Midianite father-in-law Moses is advised to introduce a class of civil, or lay, judges who will be able to deal with legal disputes among the people. This advice is adopted, and a new class of judges is instituted. The intention of recording the event is to show how the older method of administering law in Israel by priests at the sanctuaries was supplemented by an order of lay judges. These possessed the full authority of Moses who introduced their office, and entrusted them with power to administer the law.

The fact that so important a matter as the method of administering law in Israel should be seen in this way to have been dependent on Midianite advice has sometimes been taken to point to a more extensive religious dependence of Israel on the Midianites. As a community of nomadic people who at one time roamed through the Sinai desert region they were undoubtedly accustomed to worship the God of Sinai, and probably used the distinctive name of the LORD (Jehovah-Yahweh) for him. Moses' relationship to them by marriage indicates a close link with Midian, and with this the probability that certain religious features, including use of the name LORD, were borrowed from them. Beyond this, however, we cannot go, and there is no reason to suppose that the more distinctive features of Israel's religion, the emphasis on the exodus experience, the covenant with God at Sinai, and the covenant law, were derived from the Midianites.

18: 1. *Jethro priest of Midian*: for the name, and the alternatives which are found, see on 2: 15-16.



2. *When Moses had dismissed his wife Zipporah*: 4: 20 states that Moses took his wife and sons with him into Egypt. We are now informed that these had been sent back to be with Jethro, which explains why they were no longer with Moses. The note has probably arisen to explain the uncertainty of the tradition about the whereabouts of Moses' family.

3. *The name of the one was Gershom*: see on 2: 22.

4. *the other's name was Eliezer*: the name, which means 'God is my help' (see N.E.B. footnote), was no doubt a popular one, which is here interpreted with special reference to Moses' unique experiences. The earlier reference to Moses' family mentions only one son, and this is also assumed to be the case in 4: 25. The reference to 'sons' in 4: 20 reflects the further information given here.

5. *where he was encamped*: the journey to the sacred mountain is not anticipated in the itinerary of 16: 1 and 17: 1, but there can be no doubt that Sinai is intended, although it is not specifically named until 19: 2. The title *mountain of God* indicates that the place was looked upon as one where God revealed himself, and this belief must already have been well-established in Midianite tradition.

11. *the LORD is the greatest of all gods*: for the importance of this confession as a basic foundation for the emergence of monotheism in Israel see on 15: 11. It was basic to Israel's faith from the days of Moses that, although other gods might exist whom other nations could worship, no one of them was comparable to the LORD in strength and power.

12. *a whole-offering and sacrifices*: the whole-offering (Heb. 'ōlāh) was one in which the whole animal was burnt on the altar (cp. Lev. 1: 3 ff.); hence earlier versions have 'burnt offering'. The *sacrifices* were animals which were ritually slaughtered, but only certain specified parts were burnt on the altar. Most of the flesh was used to provide a sacred meal for the worshipper and his guests. At a major religious event it was customary for both forms of offering to be made.

13. *Moses took his seat*: Moses assumed the role of a tribal sheikh, or chief, hearing complaints and giving judgement in matters requiring legal advice.

15. *to seek God's guidance*: justice was regarded as a gift from God so that the right decision in settling a legal dispute was to be obtained from him. This could be given either by a respected leader such as Moses, whose experience and possession of the spirit of God enabled him to pronounce a right verdict, or by means of the sacred lot, the Urim and Thummim (see on 28: 30). At other times a prophetic oracle might be sought.

16. *I declare the statutes*: out of long experience of administering justice a considerable body of case law would be built up. Besides this, when new problems and situations arose new rulings would be obtained, thereby adding further precedents for future guidance.

20. *You must instruct them*: all the people were to be taught the basic contents of case law, and this teaching would normally be carried out in the context of family life. Such lists of precedents, or case laws, would then be collected together and written down as a more permanent expression of law. This incident thus illustrates the administrative background that is presupposed by such lists of laws as are given in chapters 20-3.

21. *search for capable, God-fearing men*: besides the popular concern for justice a body of trained lay judges was to be introduced respected by the people for their integrity, and more specialized familiarity with the law. The division of the people into general numerical groups signifies a weakening of the natural grouping into clans and tribes, a process which was greatly fostered by the state organization of David and Solomon.

22. *they must refer difficult cases to you*: many cases would remain difficult because of lack of evidence, or because the degree of culpable responsibility was in doubt, or because no precedent was known for the appropriate action to be taken. Such cases were to be referred back to Moses, and in later times



a senior religious leader, who would obtain a divine ruling, or if necessary demand a test (cp. Num. 5: 11 ff.).

27. *and he went back*: i.e. to the land of Midian. See on 2: 15. \*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Israel at Mount Sinai

We now begin the account of God's revelation on Mount Sinai which occupies the remaining chapters of the book. The account contains three main elements: (1) a theophany, or manifestation of God, upon the sacred mountain, (2) the making of a covenant between the LORD and Israel, and (3) the revelation of laws and instructions for worship. In different ways these themes reappear throughout the remaining chapters of the book, and all three are closely interwoven. The theophany serves as a confirmation of the making of the covenant between God and Israel, and the laws and instructions show the purpose and consequence of the covenant in regard to personal conduct, social justice and the practice of worship which the new knowledge of God demands. The material contained in the account of the Sinai revelation is drawn from different ages in Israel, spanning both a very early and a very late period. Not only are the basic sources J, E and P found, but much of the material was clearly already drawn up into shorter collections of laws and instructions which at one time existed independently. These have all been brought together into a comprehensive whole. Mount Sinai, and the knowledge of the covenant made there between God and Israel, have clearly served as central points of anchorage for all the main traditions governing Israel's life and worship. Material from different ages, which had acquired the status of being authoritative for Israel, was ascribed to the revelation on Sinai because this was the fountainhead of the nation's religious life. The

covenant with God, and the revelation of him in worship, belonged here so that all that these two features implied was also regarded as belonging here. The Sinai covenant may be compared to a national constitution which has undergone considerable expansion and amendment in the course of the centuries, but which is nevertheless regarded as remaining true to its original intention.

## THE THEOPHANY ON SINAI

IN THE THIRD MONTH after Israel had left Egypt,<sup>a</sup> they 19  
 I came to the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from 2  
 Rephidim and entered the wilderness of Sinai, where they  
 encamped, pitching their tents opposite the mountain.  
 Moses went up the mountain of<sup>b</sup> God, and the LORD 3  
 called to him from the mountain and said, 'Speak thus to  
 the house of Jacob, and tell this to the sons of Israel: You 4  
 have seen with your own eyes what I did to Egypt, and  
 how I have carried you on eagles' wings and brought you  
 here to me. If only you will now listen to me and keep my 5  
 covenant, then out of all peoples you shall become my  
 special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You shall 6  
 be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation. These are the  
 words you shall speak to the Israelites.'

Moses came and summoned the elders of the people 7  
 and set before them all these commands which the LORD  
 had laid upon him. The people all answered together, 8  
 'Whatever the LORD has said we will do.' Moses brought  
 this answer back to the LORD. The LORD said to Moses, 9  
 'I am now coming to you in a thick cloud, so that I may

[a] *Prob. rdg.; Heb. adds on this day.*

[b] the mountain of: *so Sept.; Heb. om.*



speak to you in the hearing of the people, and their faith  
 in you may never fail.' Moses told the LORD what the  
 10 people had said, and the LORD said to him, 'Go to the  
 people and hallow them today and tomorrow and make  
 11 them wash their clothes. They must be ready by the third  
 day, because on the third day the LORD will descend upon  
 12 Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. You must put  
 barriers round the mountain<sup>a</sup> and say, "Take care not to  
 go up the mountain or even to touch the edge of it."  
 Any man who touches the mountain must be put to death.  
 13 No hand shall touch him;<sup>b</sup> he shall be stoned or shot  
 dead;<sup>c</sup> neither man nor beast may live. But when the  
 14 ram's horn sounds, they may go up the mountain.' Moses  
 came down from the mountain to the people. He hal-  
 15 lowed them and they washed their clothes. He said to the  
 people, 'Be ready by the third day; do not go near a  
 16 woman.' On the third day, when morning came, there  
 were peals of thunder and flashes of lightning, dense cloud  
 on the mountain and a loud trumpet blast; the people in  
 the camp were all terrified.  
 17 Moses brought the people out from the camp to meet  
 God, and they took their stand at the foot of the moun-  
 18 tain. Mount Sinai was all smoking because the LORD had  
 come down upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the  
 19 smoke of a kiln; all the people were<sup>d</sup> terrified, and the  
 sound of the trumpet grew ever louder. Whenever Moses  
 20 spoke, God answered him in a peal of thunder.<sup>e</sup> The  
 LORD came down upon the top of Mount Sinai and sum-

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. people.*

[b] *Or it.* [c] *Or hurled to his death.*

[d] *So some MSS.; others all the mountain was...*

[e] *in...thunder: or by voice.*

moned Moses to the mountain-top, and Moses went up. The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down; warn the people <sup>21</sup> solemnly that they must not force their way through to the LORD to see him, or many of them will perish. Even <sup>22</sup> the priests, who have access to the LORD, must hallow themselves, for fear that the LORD may break out against them.' Moses answered the LORD, 'The people cannot <sup>23</sup> come up Mount Sinai, because thou thyself didst solemnly warn us to set a barrier to the mountain and so to keep it holy.' The LORD therefore said to him, 'Go down; <sup>24</sup> then come up and bring Aaron with you, but let neither priests nor people force their way up to the LORD, for fear that he may break out against them.' So Moses went <sup>25</sup> down to the people and spoke to them.

\* The first feature of the Sinai series of events to be described is the revelation of God in a theophany. The belief in theophanies is a very fundamental part of man's religious heritage, and is well attested both in the Old Testament and in the surviving literature of neighbouring peoples. Usually such theophanies describe a natural event, such as a thunderstorm, in such a way as to show that the presence of God was discerned within it (cp. Ps. 29). The memory of such theophanies was important both for a proper recognition of holy places (cp. the theophany which was associated with the origin of the shrine at Bethel in Gen. 28: 10-22), and for the note of authority which they gave to the communication of the divine will in the form of laws and instructions.

The account of what took place on Mount Sinai describes God's self-revelation in terms which suggest both the physical appearance of a volcano (smoke and fire like a kiln, verse 18) and of a thunderstorm (thunder and lightning, verse 16). Several scholars have concluded from this that Mount Sinai was an erupting volcano, and have consequently looked for



it in north-west Arabia, east of the Gulf of Akaba, where volcanic rock formations exist. Such a location, however, is not only outside the Sinai peninsula, but also an improbably long way from Egypt. It is much more likely that Mount Sinai is to be located somewhere close to the traditional site of the *Jebel Musa*, in the Sinai peninsula, and that conventional portrayals of a theophany, both in terms of an erupting volcano and a thunderstorm, have been drawn into the narrative as an elaboration of the original tradition.

Most of the material in this chapter has been drawn from the J and E sources, although various additions and revisions have been made to this. Verses 21-5 add a special warning note to the account of the theophany by stressing the holiness of the area of the sacred mountain, which precluded the people as a whole from ascending it. The special task of Moses, and to a lesser extent of Aaron, as the people's representatives, thereby received added significance.

19: 1. *In the third month*: because the Hebrew adds 'on this day', 'month' is taken by some scholars to mean 'new moon day', and thus to imply the first day of the month.

*the wilderness of Sinai*: the region in general probably took its name from the mountain, the actual location of which is subject to some uncertainty. It is to be identified with Horeb, for which see on 3: 1. Since early Christian times the mountain has been identified as the *Jebel Musa* (the Mountain of Moses), to which pilgrimages were made. This is situated in the south of the Sinai peninsula. The *Jebel Qaterina* (the Mountain of St Catherine), where a Greek Orthodox monastery stands, is a possible alternative site, whilst other scholars have argued that it must originally have been much further north, not far from Kadesh.

2. *They set out from Rephidim*: cp. 17: 1, which, like the present verse, comes from P. This reference to the progress of Israel's itinerary comes rather late after the setting of ch. 18 at 'the mountain of God' (18: 5).

3. *Moses went up the mountain of God*: throughout the entire

theophany and covenant-making ceremony on the mountain Moses plays an indispensable role as mediator between God and people. He combines in one person the work of priest, prophet and national leader. In later Israel no single office, either of king or priest, corresponded directly to that of Moses, which is presented as unique and unrepeatable. Nevertheless in later times the problem of the succession to Moses became important, and affected both military leaders (cp. Deut. 31: 7-8, where Joshua is appointed as leader in succession to Moses), priests (cp. Judg. 18: 30, where we learn that descendants of Moses formed a line of priests at Dan), and prophets (cp. Deut. 18: 15-19, where later prophets are shown to be the successors of Moses). At the same time the uniqueness of Moses' work as God's mediator with Israel was insisted upon (Deut. 34: 10-11).

5. *and keep my covenant*: here for the first time the event that is to take place on the mountain is referred to as the conclusion of a covenant. Basically covenants were agreements made between individuals or communities in which each accepted mutual obligations and responsibilities under the sanction of a god, or gods, who stood between them as guarantor. Here the covenant is between the LORD and the Israelites from Egypt, and no doubt from the very beginning such a covenant implied that certain obligations of conduct existed between all the Israelites who now came under the LORD's authority. Hence such a covenant implied a standard of conduct such as is set out in the laws.

6. *You shall be my kingdom of priests*: Israel was to become a kingdom like other nations, but, beyond this, it was also to enjoy a very close relationship to God, akin to that which a priest enjoyed within the community of worshippers which he served. In this way Israel was to be the priestly nation of the world, serving the nations by its service of God.

*These are the words*: this statement corresponds to the declaration of intention which formed the central core of a political treaty.



7. *the elders of the people*: these were the respected heads of households who formed the natural representatives of the people in the absence of specially appointed religious or civil officers. They were not necessarily the oldest members of the community, but those men in their prime who headed individual families.

*all these commands*: these commands (lit. 'words') are those that are given in chapters 20-3, although the primary reference is to the Ten Commandments, which form the basic laws of the Sinai covenant. Political treaties frequently included 'conditions', or 'stipulations', which a treaty partner was required to obey. There is thus a certain similarity of purpose between God's commands to Israel, and the 'conditions' which would be written into a treaty between communities.

8. *The people all answered together*: although initially Moses conveys God's requirements through the elders, the whole community respond by affirming in advance their willingness to accept the laws that God gives. The covenant is entered into voluntarily by Israel, who have already experienced the goodness and faithfulness of the LORD.

9. *I am now coming to you in a thick cloud*: this is the first announcement of the coming theophany which is to serve as a full authentication of Moses as God's spokesman in the eyes of the people, and to affirm God's gift of the covenant. God's presence, veiled in a thick cloud, had already appeared to Israel at the time of the exodus (Exod. 13: 21-2).

10. *Go to the people*: because God was to be very near to the people in the coming theophany they were to prepare themselves by the removal of everything which would conflict with the divine holiness, and the avoidance of any actions which might offend such holiness. The 'hallowing' therefore took the form of the washing of the clothes worn by the people in order to remove the uncleanness which normal life inevitably incurred. Cp. further verse 15.

11. *the LORD will descend*: God was assumed normally to reside in the distant heavens, and the special sanctity of the

mountain was established by his coming to it, or descending upon it, at particular times. This did not preclude that the mountain could be regarded as a divine 'abode'. God's presence remained veiled in mystery, even when he came near to man.

12. *You must put barriers*: this was not the literal erection of fences, but the marking off of the main area of the mountain which was to be made holy by God's appearing upon it. The mountain in general was thus treated in a similar way to the sacred area of a sanctuary, to which access was restricted. Although holiness here does not lack moral power and a sense of spiritual mystery, it is regarded as a physical force which is not to be encroached upon by persons who are unprepared. The requirement of the death penalty for any person who, either deliberately or inadvertently, touched the mountain was a consequence of this conception of holiness. Such a person would himself become holy, and would have to be put to death not so much as a punishment, but in order to prevent the holiness which he had contracted being dispersed into the profane world. Hence even wild animals which strayed upon the mountain had to be put to death.

13. *But when the ram's horn sounds*: the blowing of a ram's horn normally marked the opening of a sacred festival, heralding the presence of God with his people. The Sinai theophany thus echoes the regular practice of worship at a sanctuary, and suggests that, just as the Passover festival recalled the exodus, so the Sinai revelation was also remembered and dramatically portrayed in the earliest worship of Israel.

When the horn was blown the people were permitted to go up the mountain, because they would by then have prepared themselves fully for the occasion.

15. *do not go near a woman*: the period of hallowing before God appeared required abstinence from normal sexual relationships. This was to preclude any weakening of the vitality which holiness required, and did not imply that such relationships were regarded as opposed to God.



16. *there were peals of thunder*: here in the E description of God's appearing on Sinai the theophany is described in terms of a thunderstorm. Cp. Ps. 29; 68: 4; 104: 3 for other storm theophanies. The natural event became a sign of the supernatural power and presence of God. The loud trumpet blast reflects a practice in Israel's worship, but may also have been associated with a clap of thunder.

18. *the smoke went up*: the kiln was a smelting oven, built with stones or tiles, and shaped like a cone with an open top. It provides an effective metaphor for an erupting volcano, which is how the J narrative portrays God's presence as revealed on Sinai.

19. *Whenever Moses spoke*: the manner by which God communicates his message to men is rarely described in the Old Testament and is generally left undefined. For the prophets it lay hidden in the secrecy of their own consciousness. The special significance of God's speaking with Moses by thunder is that it could be overheard by the people as a whole, thereby serving to authenticate publicly Moses' claim to have heard God speak.

21. *warn the people solemnly*: although God was already speaking with Moses in the hearing of all the people, there was to be a further private audience between the LORD and Moses higher up the mountain. The people as a whole were refused permission to go so near to God, and even the priests were to take special precautions by hallowing themselves afresh.

The section, verses 20-5, is from J, and it shows a very marked emphasis upon the distinction between the priests and the people. Whereas the people as a whole were not to go up the mountain, near to the presence of God, the priests could do so as their representatives. J fully recognizes the existence of priests, sacrifices and altars before the legislation of Sinai, although the later P narrative regards all three as not instituted until Moses was given instructions at Sinai. In this respect J is closer to the historical reality, whereas P is more concerned to show that these institutions received their authority from Moses. ✱

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

God spoke, and these were his words: 20

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, <sup>2</sup>  
out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other god<sup>a</sup> to set against me. 3

You shall not make a carved image for yourself nor the <sup>4</sup>  
likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth  
below, or in the waters under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or worship<sup>b</sup> them; <sup>5</sup>  
for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous god. I punish the  
children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth  
generations of those who hate me. But I keep faith with <sup>6</sup>  
thousands, with<sup>c</sup> those who love me and keep my  
commandments.

You shall not make wrong use of the name of the LORD <sup>7</sup>  
your God; the LORD will not leave unpunished the man  
who misuses his name.

Remember to keep the sabbath day holy. You have six <sup>8, 9</sup>  
days to labour and do all your work. But the seventh day <sup>10</sup>  
is a sabbath of the LORD your God; that day you shall not  
do any work, you, your son or your daughter, your  
slave or your slave-girl, your cattle or the alien within  
your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and <sup>11</sup>  
earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and on the seventh  
day he rested. Therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath  
day and declared it holy.

Honour your father and your mother, that you may live <sup>12</sup>  
long in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

[a] Or gods.

[b] Or or be led to worship.

[c] with...with: or for a thousand generations with...



- 13 You shall not commit murder.  
 14 You shall not commit adultery.  
 15 You shall not steal.  
 16 You shall not give false evidence against your neighbour.  
 17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, his slave, his slave-girl, his ox, his ass, or anything that belongs to him.  
 18 When all the people saw how it thundered and the lightning flashed, when they heard the trumpet sound and saw the mountain smoking, they trembled and stood at  
 19 a distance. 'Speak to us yourself,' they said to Moses, 'and  
 20 we will listen; but if God speaks to us we shall die.' Moses answered, 'Do not be afraid. God has come only to test you, so that the fear of him may remain with you and  
 21 keep you from sin.' So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

\* The Ten Commandments of Exod. 20: 2-17 form the best known, and most central, collection of laws in the Old Testament, and are frequently called the Decalogue. It appears in closely similar form in Deut. 5: 6-21. The number ten probably arose as a simple and practical device for remembering the laws by relating them to the ten fingers of the hands. The present Decalogue is set in the context of the E source, and this invites comparison with Exod. 34: 14-26, where we have a J collection of laws which are related to the Ten Commandments of Exod. 20, being presented as a subsequent edition of them. Since Exod. 32: 19 implies that the original Decalogue was lost and the laws of Exod. 34 were given to replace them, a certain historical inconsistency is evident. This undoubtedly arose as the result of the attempt to explain the currency of two similar, but not identical, collections of commandments.

Although the Ten Commandments are preserved in the

E source, they were certainly already a self-contained collection when they were set in the E narrative, and so their origin cannot be ascribed to the authors of E. They have a very distinctive form, since they are presented as spoken by God in the first person, and do not use the more impersonal third person style that is customary for laws. This form was most likely used in the worship of early Israel, when the assembled community would be addressed by a priest, or other leader, in the name of God. The Ten Commandments would have been recited publicly to the people of Israel when, in their worship, they recalled the making of the covenant of Sinai. They are not, therefore, laws in the more technical sense of providing a description of particular offences, and the penalties to be imposed. Rather they provide a description of the fundamental aims of conduct, which form the foundation upon which more specific laws can be based. They embrace the maximum area of life, and bring this under a moral obligation to God. It is in accordance with this that the Ten Commandments do not lay down any penalties for those who break them, although it is clear that many of them relate to offences which at one time carried the death penalty. They set out the way of life that was demanded from those who belonged to God's covenant people. In their present literary setting they firmly presuppose the existence of God's covenant with Israel, and this was no doubt true of their use from earliest times, in the setting of Israel's worship. They showed how Israel was to respond to the covenant which God had made. Their special significance, therefore, does not lie so much in their setting a new standard of conduct, but in their relating the most basic demands of moral life in society to the will of God.

This setting of the Ten Commandments in the context of the covenant of Sinai has invited comparison with secular political treaties in which an imperial power established controlled relationships with vassal states. Such Suzerainty Treaties show several points of similarity with the narrative of the Sinai covenant, particularly in their inclusion of stipula-



tions, or conditions, imposed upon the vassal which, in their form, bear comparison with the Decalogue. This similarity, however, is not such as to indicate that one was consciously borrowed from the other.

Views have varied widely as to the date of the Decalogue, so that whilst several scholars have argued that the original Decalogue is as old as Moses (thirteenth century B.C.), others have placed it much later, and ascribed it to the later period of the monarchy in the eighth or seventh centuries B.C. The following points are most relevant: (1) None of the commandments necessarily presupposes a cultural or social situation which could not have applied before the settlement in the land of Canaan. Even the *house* of verse 17 could apply equally to the tent dwelling of the earlier period as to the brick and stone houses of a later age. (2) The series of commandments has been subjected to some revision and expansion, which explains the inclusion of religious explanations which are undoubtedly late, as in the justification of the sabbath law in verse 11 (cp. Gen. 2: 3 (P)). (3) The great prophets of the eighth century B.C. seem already to presuppose a basis of laws so closely related to the Decalogue as to suggest that it was certainly known to them; cp. Hos. 4: 2. (4) Individual laws and demands expressed in the Decalogue must be very much older than their incorporation into this particular written series, with its distinctive form. We are therefore more concerned with the date of the basic whole than with the date of origin of individual commandments. (5) No truly parallel legal collections have been discovered in the ancient world with which detailed comparison can be made.

Whilst this evidence suggests overall that we should date the Decalogue earlier rather than later, and almost certainly before the introduction of the monarchy at the end of the eleventh century B.C., no conclusive arguments for a precise date are available. In any case the formulation of the Decalogue was an attempt to collect and preserve laws which were believed to have belonged to the religious and moral obligations

of Israel since the Mosaic covenant was inaugurated, even though their actual literary compilation probably took place somewhat later. The laws are addressed directly to the individual in the second person singular, but they relate to actions which concerned the entire community. They therefore have a strongly social character, and both the religious and social laws concern conduct which was regarded as disruptive of the life of the community.

20: 2. *I am the LORD your God*: God's introduction of himself in the first person is a distinctive and unusual feature of the framework given to the laws here. In form it reflects the mode of address adopted by a specially authorized priest, addressing the assembled community of Israel. In purpose it serves to identify the character and will of the God who alone has the right to impose these demands upon Israel because of his saving action in making them into his people.

3. *You shall have no other god to set against me*: Israel is restricted to the sole and exclusive worship of the LORD, and no rival deity of any kind is to be tolerated. This is not a strict monotheism, since it does not deny that other gods may exist for other nations, but it clearly served to establish a monotheistic pattern of worship in Israel out of which the later theological monotheism emerged. By its position of priority, this demand for devotion to the one God established this as the basis of religion, on the basis of which duty to one's neighbour followed.

4. *You shall not make a carved image for yourself*: since the first command excludes the worship of any other deity, the implication is that such an image would be a symbol of the LORD, the God of Israel. No image of him is permitted because, according to the thinking of the ancient world, such images provided the worshipper with a fixed point of contact with the deity after whom they were named. Such fixed contact tempted the worshipper into assuming that he had some degree of control over God, and it is this assumption that is rejected by this prohibition.



5. *a jealous god*: the title does not imply unworthy feelings of envy or suspicion in God but his determination to uphold his honour in the face of evil and falsehood, and his refusal to allow himself to be displaced by any rival.

*I punish the children*: this is not an assertion of divine vindictiveness, but a reflection of ancient legal practice in which all the members of a household were regarded as implicated in the guilt incurred by any one of their number. *the third and fourth generations* reflects the greatest probable extent of the range of members of any one family actually living together in one household.

7. *You shall not make wrong use of the name*: the traditional rendering 'take in vain' of earlier versions does less than justice to the true impact of this command. It is not so much frivolous or unthinking use that is condemned as the wilful invocation of the LORD's name to support malevolent accusations, lying evidence, and possibly also magical spells and incantations. Such use of the LORD's name to support what was evil flouted the righteousness of God's nature and his impartiality in judgement. Excessive respect for this command eventually led to the refusal among pious Jews to pronounce the divine name at all. See comment on 3: 14.

8. *Remember to keep the sabbath day holy*: that this commandment is formulated positively, and not negatively, has led many scholars to suggest that it too originally took the form 'You shall not work on the sabbath'. This is not necessary, however, and the use of the verb 'remember' indicates that it was concerned not merely with abstention from work, but also with an active participation in worship. The explanation of the command in verses 9-11 has certainly been added later, leaving the possibility that the sabbath was at one time observed less frequently than the seven-day interval that later prevailed. Cp. its association with the new moon day in Amos 8: 5; 2 Kings 4: 23. This, however, is not a necessary deduction from its association with the lunar cycle. Certainly the observance of the sabbath as a sacred day in which no

work was to be done goes back to earliest Israel, and its relation to a seven-day cycle also appears to have been early, although this may represent a subsequent development of the earliest observance. It not only provided a practical opportunity for rest, which humanitarian concerns demanded (cp. Deut. 5: 12-15), but signified the consecration of time to God by setting aside a special part of the week for him.

10. *the alien within your gates*: the *alien* was a person of foreign origin who had made a permanent home in Israel, and who had attached himself to a particular tribe or city in order to obtain rights of protection. Thus he was distinguished from the true 'foreigner' who did not have this loyalty to Israel.

11. *for in six days*: this conception of the time interval of creation, by which the sabbath was incorporated into the cosmic order, belongs to the late (post-exilic) P account of creation (Gen. 2: 3). It was added at a comparatively late stage to the original sabbath command.

12. *Honour your father and your mother*: this is another positively formulated command, which is sometimes thought originally to have been couched negatively, i.e. 'You shall not curse your father or your mother'. This also is not a necessary or probable conclusion, since the whole aim of this commandment is to secure positive support for ageing parents from their children, who are themselves assumed to be mature adults. When families lived together in large groups ageing parents who could no longer work were entirely dependent upon their children to support them economically. It is this care of the old that is demanded here.

13. *You shall not commit murder*: the verb used here does not cover all taking of human life, since in certain circumstances, such as war and the execution of the death penalty, this was assumed to be necessary. Rather it refers both to premeditated murder, and also to the private taking of revenge on people suspected of murder without recourse to proper legal investigation and public trial.

14. *You shall not commit adultery*: in ancient Israel betrothal



was regarded as a legal basis of marriage so that a betrothed girl was covered by this command just as much as a married woman.

15. *You shall not steal*: since no object is expressly mentioned, and a general regard for private property is covered by the tenth commandment, it is widely accepted that this command originally prohibited man-stealing (cp. Exod. 21: 16). This was a very serious offence, perpetrated in order to acquire slaves, and one which opposed the most basic rights of human freedom. Later the object 'a man' was omitted in order to give the command a wider coverage, and to protect all private property.

16. *You shall not give false evidence*: the establishment of a just and effective legal administration was wholly dependent on the truthfulness of witnesses who gave evidence. Dishonesty here could undermine the entire legal system, and therefore required very serious treatment. Whilst 'telling lies' in general is certainly covered by this command, it referred more specifically to wrongful behaviour in a court of law which could result in a miscarriage of justice.

17. *You shall not covet your neighbour's house*: the fuller definition of the object coveted in terms of a person's family, servants and property has been added later to show the full implications of the law. *House* clearly means 'household', and included the contents of the building in the widest sense. The term *covet* is unexpected in view of the fact that the preceding laws have dealt with overt actions, whereas this prohibits a wrongful attitude. It has consequently been suggested that its original meaning here must have been 'misappropriate, acquire illegally'. Whilst this is possible, it is not a necessary deduction, and it need not occasion surprise that such a fundamental moral standard as is given here should emphasize those responsibilities which the more technical administration of law presupposed, but could not easily deal with.

18. *When all the people saw how it thundered*: verses 18-21,

which are from the E source, go back to the theophany of chapter 19, and show how the requirement that Moses should act as mediator was fulfilled (verses 19-21; cp. 19: 23-4). The immediate communication of God with Israel takes place through Moses, but in such a way as to allow the people as a whole to see and hear God's active presence. Thus Moses is seen by all the people to have been given divine authority. \*

#### THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

After the declaration of the Ten Commandments, which form the primary law of the Sinai covenant, we are introduced here to a further law collection which is usually termed 'The Book of the Covenant' on the basis of the reference in 24: 8. Like the Decalogue it undoubtedly at one time formed a separate, and self-contained, collection of laws which has been inserted into the narrative of the Sinai revelation, probably at a time when J and E had already been combined. The laws themselves are found in 20: 22 - 23: 19, to which has been added in 23: 20-33 a concluding survey which looks ahead to the departure from Sinai and the entry into Canaan. This addition did not belong to the original law collection, but has been introduced to help assimilate the laws, which for the most part presuppose the conditions of life in Canaan, into their narrative context.

Both in style and content the Book of the Covenant is very different from the Decalogue. Whereas the latter is brief and comprehensive in its demands, the former is more elaborately set out and more precise in defining particular offences. Furthermore it prescribes penalties, which the Decalogue does not, and uses the indefinite third person style 'when a man...', which contrasts with the direct second person style of the Ten Commandments. We can conclude therefore that the Book of the Covenant represents a handbook of legal rulings, brought together for the guidance of judges and elders concerned with the administration of justice in a community.



Only a comparatively small part of the collection is directly concerned with public worship (20: 22-6; 23: 13-19) and relates to matters of religious ritual. This collection of legal rulings, or case law, compares closely with similar law codes of the ancient Near East, of which the best known is the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (about 1700 B.C.). Similar collections are found even earlier in Sumeria (the Laws of Eshnunna, about 2000 B.C.), and there are also close parallels in Assyrian and Hittite laws. The tradition of such laws was therefore both very ancient and international, belonging to the growth and development of civilization in the Near East. What we have in the Book of the Covenant is an Israelite legal handbook intended to establish a uniform pattern of justice in the communities living in the settled land of Palestine.

So far as the date of this law code is concerned, a precise ascription can hardly be given, since the laws apply to the everyday life of a typical settled community, without direct reference to external political conditions. As the laws of Deuteronomy (not later than 621 B.C.) show an attempt to revise and adapt the Book of the Covenant to a later era, the latter must be older. It presupposes in a number of its laws the conditions of life in the settled land of Palestine so that it must have been compiled after the settlement of Israel in the late thirteenth century B.C. Since there is no clear indication of the new political situation introduced by the monarchy in Israel, nor of the responsibility of the king and his officers for the administration of justice, it is probable that the Book of the Covenant had assumed its present form before the age of David, about 1000 B.C. Thus it may be dated about 1200-1100 B.C., although like other such codes it underwent subsequent revision. It was either compiled originally to ensure a uniform standard of law over a particular region (the region settled by Ephraim, with its centre at Shechem would be most likely), or more probably it was drawn up to establish uniformity in the administration of law between the various tribes which made up Israel.

## THE LAW OF THE ALTAR

The LORD said to Moses, Say this to the Israelites: You<sup>22</sup> know now that I have spoken to you from heaven. You<sup>23</sup> shall not make gods of silver to be worshipped as well as me, nor shall you make yourselves gods of gold. You<sup>24</sup> shall make an altar of earth for me, and you shall sacrifice on it both your whole-offerings and your shared<sup>a</sup>-offerings, your sheep and your cattle. Wherever<sup>b</sup> I cause my name to be invoked, I will come to you and bless you. If you<sup>25</sup> make an altar of stones for me, you must not build it of hewn stones, for if you use a chisel on it, you will profane it. You must not mount up to my altar by steps, in<sup>26</sup> case your private parts be exposed on it.

\* As a preface to the main series of laws we have this set of rules which lay down the restrictions which are to govern the sanctuaries used by Israel for the worship of the LORD. By setting these regulations first the implication is made that this worship is the foremost duty of Israel. The fact of God affirms the reality and impartiality of the justice which the following laws seek to uphold. In Israel duty towards one's fellow man was based on a prior duty to God.

22. *I have spoken to you from heaven*: cp. 19: 19 (E) and contrast 19: 18, 20 (J), which suggest that God descended on to the mountain. The reference to the LORD's speaking from heaven is intended to show why images of him are prohibited, since he cannot be restricted to the material things of earth. The specific mention of silver and gold as the material out of which such images would be made also implies that no less expensive materials could be used either.

24. *You shall make an altar of earth for me*: the simplest type

[a] Exact mng. of Heb. uncertain.

[b] So Sam.; Heb. In all the place where.



of altar was built up from a mound of earth to provide a place for the offering of sacrifice. The animal's blood was poured on it, and either all or part of its carcase was then burnt on it. Thus the altars were holy as the places where men encountered God, and where they yielded to him their holy offerings. It was therefore necessary to take special care in regard to them.

*your whole-offerings and your shared-offerings*: these represent two of the more common types of sacrifice which are mentioned in connection with early Israelite worship. For the whole-offering see on 18: 12. The shared-offering (called 'peace offering' in earlier versions) required only that certain parts were burnt (cp. Lev. 3: 1-17), whilst the rest of the carcase was eaten by the worshipper and his guests. The precise meaning of the name is not clear. 'Covenant-offering', 'communion-offering' and even 'concluding offering' have all been suggested, from the name which etymologically indicates 'completion, wholeness, health'.

*Wherever I cause my name*: the reference is to the priestly proclamation of the name of the LORD in the invocation of blessing upon the worshipping community (cp. Num. 6: 24-7). The divine name is full of divine power, and so its solemn declaration becomes a means by which God himself is present to his people.

25. *If you make an altar of stones for me*: as a variant from a simple earthen altar the possibility of one made from stones is considered. In this case the stones must be in their natural intact state, not cut by human hands. The belief is that such cutting would mar their God-given created wholeness. The conception is no doubt primitive, but does not imply that a *numen*, or spirit, was thought to dwell within the stones. Both earthen and stone altars were in use long before the rise of Israel.

26. *You must not mount up*: the prohibition against building steps to facilitate attendance at an altar presupposes that the altar would be approached by an ordinary lay Israelite wearing his usual dress. At a later time steps were used, when altars

had become larger (cp. Ezek. 43: 17; Exod. 27: 5), but sacrifice was then restricted to priests who wore a special linen undergarment (Exod. 28: 42). \*

## LAWS OF SLAVERY

These are the laws you shall set before them: 21

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall be your slave <sup>2</sup> for six years, but in the seventh year he shall go free and pay nothing.

If he comes to you alone, he shall go away alone; but <sup>3</sup> if he is married, his wife shall go away with him.

If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or <sup>4</sup> daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and the man shall go away alone. But if the slave <sup>5</sup> should say, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go free', then his master shall bring him to God: <sup>6</sup> he shall bring him to the door or the door-post, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl, and the man shall be his slave for life.

When a man sells his daughter into slavery, she shall <sup>7</sup> not go free as a male slave may. If her master has not had <sup>8</sup> intercourse with her<sup>a</sup> and she does not please him, he shall let her be ransomed. He has treated her unfairly and therefore has no right to sell her to strangers. If he assigns her <sup>9</sup> to his son, he shall allow her the rights of a daughter. If he <sup>10</sup> takes another woman, he shall not deprive the first of meat, clothes, and conjugal rights. If he does not provide <sup>11</sup> her with these three things, she shall go free without any payment.

[a] *So Pesh.; Heb.* has assigned her to himself.



\* Early Israel fully accepted slavery as a given part of the social order, and although there is a recognition of its oppressiveness, there is no rejection of it as an institution. Nevertheless the slave was not deprived of all rights, and the law sought to protect him from the worst abuses of his plight. Slaves would normally be acquired either from foreign countries as prisoners of war, or from Israel itself, when Israelites were compelled to sell their families and their own persons into slavery as a payment for debt. The latter situation is primarily in mind here.

21: 2. *When you buy a Hebrew slave:* the title 'Hebrew' here has a very distinctive significance. It does not indicate a special racial group, but rather the legal and social status of those people who became slaves (cp. the comment on 1: 15). It thus reflects the structure of ancient Near Eastern society, and is used to indicate the social stratum to which slaves belonged. When a person was compelled through force of circumstances to sell himself into slavery, a maximum period of six years was fixed for this servitude. Prisoners of war are not in mind here, and they would customarily have been sold into a permanent slavery.

4. *If his master gives him a wife:* if a wife has been given to the slave by his master, then she remains the latter's property at the time when her husband's release becomes due. More surprisingly, the children of this slave marriage remain with the mother rather than the father. This cuts across the marriage law which was valid for free Israelites, and reflects very markedly the attitude which viewed slaves as property rather than persons. Only if a female slave were already married at the time of her enslavement could she be released with her husband.

5. *But if the slave should say:* the situation of a slave after release was a very precarious one since he would seldom have had access to sufficient resources to establish himself as a free citizen (the later law of Deut. 15: 14 attempts to solve this by providing him with a certain basic capital). It was perfectly

feasible therefore that a slave would be prepared to forego his right to release, and to continue as a permanent slave, especially when release would deprive him of his wife and family.

6. *then his master shall bring him to God*: the parallel instructions to bring the slave to *God* or to *the door or the door-post* point to a religious situation in which a household god would have been kept by the threshold of a house to guard it. The piercing of the ear with an awl served to set a permanent mark on the slave, and to signify his obligation to obedience. The performance of the ceremony near to the household god made the latter a witness.

7. *When a man sells his daughter*: the position of a female slave differed considerably from that of a male because she would almost inevitably become involved in some sexual relationship in the household, and this had to be safeguarded. Only if no sexual relationship was involved could she be ransomed (verse 8).

9. *If he assigns her to his son*: when a female slave was given to be the wife of a son of the household she assumed the rights of a daughter, which then protected her against sexual abuse (cp. Lev. 18: 15). It was most probably the neglect of this law which is condemned by the prophet Amos (Amos 2: 7).

10. *If he takes another woman*: at this period in Israel polygamy was accepted without question, which made it necessary for the law to intervene to protect the women of a polygamous household who could be unfairly treated if they fell into disfavour. In the case of a slave wife, the price of such unfair treatment was that which gave her her freedom. \*

#### LAWS REGARDING CAPITAL OFFENCES

Whoever strikes another man and kills him shall be <sup>12</sup> put to death. But if he did not act with intent, but they <sup>13</sup> met by act of God, the slayer may flee to a place which I will appoint for you. But if the man has the presumption <sup>14</sup>



to kill another by treachery, you shall take him even from my altar to be put to death.

15 Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death.

16 Whoever kidnaps a man shall be put to death, whether he has sold him, or the man is found in his possession.

17 Whoever reviles his father or mother shall be put to death.

\* The cases dealt with here include murder, kidnapping and the striking or cursing of a parent. They are all set out very briefly, and with a similar urgency to that which characterizes the Ten Commandments. They may at one time, therefore, like the latter, have been intended to be proclaimed orally as part of an act of worship. In style they undoubtedly come between the simple mandatory demand of the Ten Commandments and the more precise definition of a legal ruling as found in the case-laws.

12-14. *Whoever strikes another man*: the simple demands of retribution required that the murderer be put to death, and the basic law asserts this. An appendix has been added which distinguishes the case of manslaughter from that of murder. The possibility of accidental killing is considered, which is rather fatalistically described as an act of God (verse 13). Since no man has willed the killing, it is assumed to have been willed by God. Thus the determination of guilt rests upon the recognition of evil intent, rather than on the simple act of killing. To provide for such a case the killer could flee to a place of refuge, which was at one time the local sanctuary (verse 14), although later certain cities were designated for this purpose (Deut. 19: 4 ff.; Num. 35: 9 ff.). Fleeing to such a refuge granted the killer asylum until the case against him could be investigated, but if he were found guilty he was then taken and executed.

15. *Whoever strikes his father or mother*: both the striking of

parents, and the cursing of them (verse 17), were treated as capital offences punishable by death. Since the family was the basic unit of society it required special protection as a part of God's order for human life. Its disruption by violent acts or words threatened the stability of the entire social order, so that such actions were punished with the greatest severity. Once again, as in 20: 12, the persons addressed are regarded as mature adults, not young children.

16. *Whoever kidnaps a man*: kidnapping, which would have been for the purpose of selling a man into slavery, is regarded as a capital offence. An additional clause concerns the question of proof of the crime, and stipulates that the case is to be treated in the same way whether the victim has already been sold into slavery or is found in the culprit's possession.

17. *Whoever reviles his father or mother*: it is not mere harsh words that are in mind here, but a deliberate act of cursing in which the very words are regarded as powerful enough to inflict harm. \*

#### LAWS REGARDING BODILY INJURY

When men quarrel and one hits another with a stone <sup>18</sup> or with a spade,<sup>a</sup> and the man is not killed but takes to his bed; if he recovers so as to walk about outside with a stick, <sup>19</sup> then the one who struck him has no liability, except that he shall pay for loss of time and shall see that he is cured.

When a man strikes his slave or his slave-girl with a <sup>20</sup> stick and the slave dies on the spot, he must be punished. But he shall not be punished if the slave survives for one <sup>21</sup> day or two, because he is worth money to his master.

When, in the course of a brawl, a man knocks against <sup>22</sup> a pregnant woman so that she has a miscarriage but suffers

[a] Or fist.



no further hurt, then the offender must pay whatever fine the woman's husband demands after assessment.

23,24 Wherever hurt is done, you shall give life for life, eye  
25 for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn  
for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.

26 When a man strikes his slave or slave-girl in the eye and  
destroys it, he shall let the slave go free in compensation  
27 for the eye. When he knocks out the tooth of a slave or  
slave-girl, he shall let the slave go free in compensation  
for the tooth.

28 When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox  
shall be stoned, and its flesh may not be eaten; the owner  
29 of the ox shall be free from liability. If, however, the ox  
has for some time past been a vicious animal, and the  
owner has been duly warned, but has not kept it under  
control, and the ox kills a man or a woman, then the ox  
shall be stoned, and the owner shall be put to death as  
30 well. If, however, the penalty is commuted for a money  
payment, he shall pay in redemption of his life whatever  
31 is imposed upon him. If the ox gores a son or a daughter,  
32 the same rule shall apply. If the ox gores a slave or slave-  
girl, its owner shall pay thirty shekels of silver to their  
master, and the ox shall be stoned.

33 When a man removes the cover of a well<sup>a</sup> or digs a  
well<sup>a</sup> and leaves it uncovered, then if an ox or an ass falls  
34 into it, the owner of the well shall make good the loss.  
He shall repay the owner of the beast in silver, and the  
dead beast shall be his.

35 When one man's ox butts another's and kills it, they  
shall sell the live ox, share the price and also share the

[a] Or cistern.

dead beast. But if it is known that the ox has for some time <sup>36</sup> past been vicious and the owner has not kept it under control, he shall make good the loss, ox for ox, but the dead beast is his.

\* The cases dealt with by these laws concern offences resulting in bodily injury, but which for the most part do not lead to the death of the victim. Their main concern is to stipulate the amount of compensation which is to be paid for the damage done. It is valuable to notice that, as in the laws of verses 2-11, where these laws concern slavery, they seek to protect slaves against the worst excesses of abuse by their owners.

18. *When men quarrel*: in the case of injury resulting from a brawl, the guilt of an offender extends only to the requirement to pay compensation for the loss of the victim's working time and to do whatever is possible to have him healed. This is considerably less than the strict application of the law of retribution required (verses 23-6), but it is assumed that both the victim and the offender were equally guilty in starting the brawl, or at least that the degree of individual responsibility could not be satisfactorily proved. The word 'spade' (Heb. *'egrōp*) is translated 'fist' in earlier English versions (cp. the N.E.B. footnote), but the meaning here is supported from Aramaic and Syriac evidence.

20. *When a man strikes his slave*: the beating of slaves is assumed to be normal, but if the slave dies, then the owner is to be punished. The exact nature of this punishment is not defined, but since the word used primarily refers to the exaction of vengeance it appears that the death penalty required by the principle of retribution was to be applied here. In this matter no distinction was conceded between the murder of a slave and the murder of a free citizen.

21. *But he shall not be punished*: the surprising leniency here, which leaves the owner entirely unpunished if the slave survives for a day or two, results from the possibility of doubt



arising as to the exact cause of death. The slave may have contracted an illness after his injury, in which case it would be impossible to prove that the injury was the primary cause of death. The owner is given the benefit of the doubt because it is assumed that he would not deliberately destroy his own valuable property.

22. *whatever fine*: the precise amount is not specified, but was clearly intended to represent compensation for the loss of the infant. This would be assessed initially by the husband, but was subject to the agreement of outside assessors, or judges, who would be responsible for ensuring that the amount was fair.

23-5. *you shall give life for life*: the dramatic description here of the basic principle of retribution has earned it the name of the *lex talionis* (law of retribution). It does not represent a separate law so much as a principle by which the punishments and fines imposed by the law are to be assessed; hence its introduction here as a postscript to the law stated in verse 22. It is clear from its setting that this principle was not to be applied independently by individual citizens, which would lead to unrestrained crimes of vengeance, but by the recognized judges who were responsible for maintaining justice in the community.

26-7. *When a man strikes his slave or slave-girl*: the principle of compensation in the case of an injured slave was modified in that for the loss of an eye or tooth the slave was to be released, thus incurring the forfeiture of his, or her, purchase price.

28. *the ox shall be stoned*: the law of verses 28-32 concerns injury inflicted by an ox. In each case the ox is to be stoned, being treated like a criminal, although in this case it is an animal and not a human being. This possibly reflects a religious conception in which the animal is thought to have incurred 'guilt'. In any case death by stoning made the carcass of the animal useless for food or anything else. If the ox were already known to be vicious, the owner himself could become

subject to the death penalty for his negligence (verse 29). In this case it became permissible for the owner to pay a fine instead of forfeiting his beast, fixed at the valuation of his own life, or less if the victim was a child or a slave.

32. *thirty shekels of silver*: this was apparently the current average price for a slave. See pp. 194-5.

33. *When a man removes the cover of a well*: the owner of property was held to be responsible for maintaining it in a safe condition. If injury resulted from his negligence then he was responsible for paying full compensation for the harm done. His obligation, however, only extended to making good the value of the loss. No additional fine was imposed, and the carcase of a dead beast for which compensation had been paid was to belong to the person who had paid for it.

35-6. *When one man's ox butts another's*: when beasts with different owners fought and one was killed, it was regarded as impossible to apportion blame between the two. Hence the amount of the loss was to be shared equally between the two owners. If, however, the surviving ox were known to be vicious then his owner is assumed to have been culpable of neglect, and had to accept sole responsibility for the other ox-owner's loss. \*

#### LAWS REGARDING DAMAGE TO PROPERTY

When a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters or sells 22<sup>1a</sup> it, he shall repay five beasts for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. He shall pay in full; if he has no means, he 2-4<sup>b</sup> shall be sold to pay for the theft. But if the animal is found alive in his possession, be it ox, ass, or sheep, he shall repay two.

<sup>c</sup>If a burglar is caught in the act and is fatally injured,

[a] 21: 37 in Heb.

[b] Verses 2-4 re-arranged thus: 3 B, 4, 2, 3 A.

[c] 22: 1 in Heb.



it is not murder; but if he breaks in after sunrise and is fatally injured, then it is murder.

5 When a man burns off a field or a vineyard and lets the fire spread so that it burns another man's field,<sup>a</sup> he shall make restitution from his own field according to the yield expected; and if the whole field is laid waste,<sup>b</sup> he shall make restitution from the best part of his own field or vineyard.

6 When a fire starts and spreads to a heap of brushwood, so that sheaves, or standing corn, or a whole field is destroyed, he who started the fire shall make full restitution.

7 When one man gives another silver or chattels for safe keeping, and they are stolen from that man's house, the  
8 thief, if he is found, shall restore twofold. But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall appear before  
9 God, to make a declaration that he has not touched his neighbour's property. In every case of law-breaking involving an ox, an ass, or a sheep, a cloak, or any lost property which may be claimed, each party shall bring his case before God; he whom God declares to be in the wrong shall restore twofold to his neighbour.

10 When a man gives an ass, an ox, a sheep or any beast into his neighbour's keeping, and it dies or is injured or is  
11 carried off, there being no witness, the neighbour shall swear by the LORD that he has not touched the man's property. The owner shall accept this, and no restitution  
12 shall be made. If it has been stolen from him, he shall  
13 make restitution to the owner. If it has been mauled by

[a] Or When a man uses his field or vineyard for grazing, and lets his beast loose, and it feeds in another man's field.

[b] he shall...waste: so *Sam.*; *Heb. om.*

a wild beast, he shall bring it in as evidence; he shall not make restitution for what has been mauled.

When a man borrows a beast<sup>a</sup> from his neighbour and <sup>14</sup> it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, the borrower shall make full restitution; but if the owner is <sup>15</sup> with it, the borrower shall not make restitution. If it was hired, only the hire shall be due.

When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed, <sup>16</sup> he shall pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her <sup>17</sup> father refuses to give her to him, the seducer shall pay in silver a sum equal to the bride-price for virgins.

\* The laws regarding damage to, or loss of, property which are set out here presuppose that a measure of evil intent is involved. Thus, unlike the cases where responsibility for another man's loss of property could be put right simply by the payment of compensation, there is a much greater additional payment here which acts as a fine. The deliberate theft of an ox requires the payment of five oxen as its punishment. Because the intention of committing a crime is involved, certain basic rules for establishing the fact of evil intent are required. These in turn require a certain understanding of what does, and what does not, constitute evidence of evil intent. In certain cases it is frankly recognized (e.g. in verses 8, 9, 11) that proof of evil intent cannot be satisfactorily obtained. In these cases the suspect is given the benefit of the doubt, but is made to invoke a curse upon himself *before God*, which it is assumed will produce a harmful effect if he is really guilty. It is clear that these ancient Israelite laws fully recognized the importance of a person's intention in establishing whether a crime had been committed or not, but they often lacked the means of establishing what this intention was. In such cases the suspect was given the benefit of the doubt.

[a] a beast: *so Scroll; Heb. om.*



22: 1, 3-4. *When a man steals an ox or a sheep*: an ox is assumed to be more valuable than a sheep so that the theft of the former is a more serious offence. As a result the fine imposed in such a case is harsher (5 oxen) than that imposed for the theft of a sheep (4 sheep). It is recognized that a thief will often be too poor to pay the stipulated fine, in which case payment is made by selling the thief into slavery. The evil intentions of the thief are assumed to be the more serious if he has already killed or sold the stolen property. If, on the other hand, it is found to be still in his possession the fine is reduced, because his offence is held to be less serious. A man who quickly sold the property he had stolen was regarded as a more dangerous criminal than one who retained it for his own use.

The law regarding burglary in verses 2-3 *A* has been inserted between the laws of theft in verses 1, 3 *B*, and 4 in the Hebrew text. This has rightly been corrected in the present translation, as the verse numbering shows.

2-3 *A*. *If a burglar is caught in the act*: burglary was normally committed after dark, and if the house-owner killed the thief in the course of protecting his own property at night this did not count as murder. In the dark it would be impossible to be sure exactly what was happening. In daylight, however, even the thief was accorded the right of personal protection, so that his death would be treated as a case of murder.

5. *When a man burns off a field*: the verb that is here translated 'to burn off' has several meanings, the most common of which is 'to burn with fire'. Since burning off the stubble of a field is a common agricultural practice, this is most likely its meaning here, although many commentators (as also R.S.V.) take it to mean 'to graze over', and refer it to cattle straying into another man's field or vineyard. In either case the law demands the payment of full compensation for the damage done by the culprit from the best of his produce.

8. *shall appear before God*: for the practice cp. 1 Kings 8: 31 f. The use of the general term *God* rather than the specific

name of the LORD suggests that the law was originally formulated at a time when it could not be assumed that every citizen worshipped the same God. In this case the house-owner who had lost property which had been deposited with him was to testify on oath in the sanctuary *before God* that he was not guilty of misappropriating it. No other way of dealing with the situation was regarded as legally satisfactory. The suspect was treated as innocent, because he could not be proved guilty, and the punishment was left to God if he really were guilty.

9. *he whom God declares to be in the wrong*: no indication is given as to the way in which a 'judgement from God' was brought into play in order to decide difficult cases of contradictory claims to possession of property. Some form of sacred trial, or testing (cp. Num. 5: 11-28), may have been envisaged, but possibly it consisted simply in the obtaining of an oracle by the priest. This would have been by using the Urim and Thummim, for which see below on 28: 30.

11. *the neighbour shall swear by the LORD*: once again the most obvious suspect has to clear himself by swearing an oath as to his innocence. The community then took no further action, but it was accepted that God would punish a guilty person who had added to his original crime the further offence of swearing an oath to a lie (cp. Exod. 20: 7).

12. *If it has been stolen from him*: whereas accidental injury or loss of a neighbour's animal for which one is responsible is accepted, subject to an oath, in the case where it has been stolen further action is called for. A degree of negligence is implied which requires that compensation is paid to the owner, but no fine is added.

14. *When a man borrows a beast*: the presence or absence of the beast's owner at the time when it was injured or killed determines the apportionment of blame. The borrower is responsible for what is entrusted to his use and care, but if the rightful owner sees what happens then the borrower is freed from any blame.



15. *If it was hired*: this is a very terse phrase in the Hebrew, which lays down that, if the beast was hired, no compensation is to be given for its injury or death, but the hiring charge is still to be paid. It may, however, refer instead to the borrower as a hired labourer, in which case it means that the charge is to be set against his wages.

16. *he shall pay the bride-price*: normally at marriage the groom's family paid a substantial sum, either in money or in goods, to the bride's family. This was compensation for the loss of a daughter, but more important it also served as a pledge for the good behaviour of the husband towards his bride. It thereby served to strengthen the bonds of marriage. \*

## VARIOUS LAWS

18 You shall not allow a witch to live.

19 Whoever has unnatural connection with a beast shall be put to death.

20 Whoever sacrifices to any god but the LORD shall be put to death under solemn ban.

21 You shall not wrong an alien, or be hard upon him;  
22 you were yourselves aliens in Egypt. You shall not  
23 ill-treat any widow or fatherless child. If you do, be  
24 sure that I will listen if they appeal to me; my anger  
will be roused and I will kill you with the sword; your  
own wives shall become widows and your children  
fatherless.

25 If you advance money to any poor man amongst my  
people, you shall not act like a money-lender; you must  
not exact interest in advance from him.

26 If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, you shall  
27 return it to him by sunset, because it is his only covering.  
It is the cloak in which he wraps his body; in what else

can he sleep? If he appeals to me, I will listen, for I am full of compassion.

You shall not revile God, nor curse a chief of your own <sup>28</sup> people.

You shall not hold back the first of your harvest, <sup>29</sup> whether corn or wine.<sup>a</sup> You shall give me your first-born sons. You shall do the same with your oxen and your <sup>30</sup> sheep. They shall stay with the mother for seven days; on the eighth day you shall give them to me.

You shall be holy to me: you shall not eat the flesh of <sup>31</sup> anything in the open country killed by beasts, but you shall throw it to the dogs.

\* These laws show no uniformity of subject matter, although they have in common the impressive 'command' style, couched in the second person mode of address. Some of the laws have been expanded by the addition of admonitory notes, or exhortations. No doubt those that are preserved here once formed an independent collection which was then incorporated into the Book of the Covenant in order to make a comprehensive statement of Israelite law.

18. *You shall not allow a witch to live*: the practice of divination and the casting of spells was widespread among Israel's neighbours, but was very strongly opposed on religious grounds in Israel (cp. Deut. 18: 10-14 for various types of such witchcraft). It implied a use of supernatural power outside of, and hostile to, the power of the LORD. It is assumed here that the main practitioners of such activities were women, and that their witchcraft consisted mainly in putting spells upon people which were thought to induce sickness or personal failure.

20. *shall be put to death*: to be put under the ban referred primarily to expulsion from the community as the removal of

[a] the first... wine: *mng. of Heb. words uncertain.*



a person from the sphere of life controlled by the LORD. Such expulsion from the community no doubt often resulted in death, either by starvation or at the hands of enemies, but may not always have entailed a deliberate act of execution.

21. *You shall not wrong an alien*: the alien (Heb. *gēr*) had no strong family or tribal support in the community, and so could not always protect himself in a dispute. It is particularly emphasized by the law, therefore, that no advantage is to be taken of the alien's weaker position. For the alien see on 20: 10.

22. *You shall not ill-treat*: in a patriarchal society the father and the 'father's house' provided the basic unit of legal and economic strength. Widows and their children often remained outside such a preserve of male protection, especially in the urban areas of the ancient Near East, which made it especially necessary to demand charitable consideration for them.

25. *If you advance money*: money would normally be lent by professional money-lenders, at a reasonable rate of interest, to support commercial ventures. This was not to be the action taken towards a poor fellow Israelite. Money lent to him was to help him out of his time of distress, and not for commercial gain. Therefore no interest was to be taken from him in advance, and most interpreters have taken this to mean that no interest at all was to be taken in such a case.

26. *If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn*: a man's cloak was his most basic possession, and could therefore only be used as deposit against a loan in a very restricted way. It had to be returned by sundown lest the owner should suffer from the effects of exposure during the night. This demand is then reinforced by a strong affirmation of God's compassion for the poor.

28. *nor curse a chief of your own people*: an offence of cursing God and the king is referred to in 1 Kings 21: 10. Here, however, it is not the king but the chief who appears as the foremost representative of the people, indicating the origin of the law at a time before Israel introduced a monarchy. The exact role of the chief (Heb. *nāsī'*) in this early period is uncertain,

but the likelihood is that he represented his own tribe in deliberations and activities involving other tribes.

29. *the first of your harvest*: since God was regarded as the owner of the land and as the giver of its produce, only when the first sheaves and fruits of the harvest and vintage had been solemnly handed back to him at the local sanctuary could the remainder be enjoyed by men.

*You shall give me your first-born sons*: the demand that the first-born of human children, like the first-born of the flocks and herds, belong to God is set out as a basic principle. No indication is given here whether such children were actually to be given to God, as child sacrifices, or whether they were to be 'redeemed' by the payment of compensation. See above on 13: 1 ff. Throughout the known period of Israel's worship the principle of compensation was accepted, either by substituting a lamb for the child (cp. Exod. 34: 20), or by regarding the priestly duties of the tribe of Levi as an overall compensation for all Israel (Num. 3: 11-13, 44-51). Only in rare instances are there indications of the practice of child sacrifice in Israel, as in the case of Ahaz king of Judah (2 Kings 16: 3).

31. *the flesh of anything . . . killed by beasts*: animals killed in the wild by other beasts would not have been slaughtered according to the ritual prescription covering sacrifice, and were therefore unholy. \*

#### LAWS REGARDING CONDUCT IN LEGAL CASES

You shall not spread a baseless rumour. You shall not **23** make common cause with a wicked man by giving malicious evidence.

You shall not be led into wrongdoing by the majority, <sup>2</sup> nor, when you give evidence in a lawsuit, shall you side with the majority to pervert justice;<sup>a</sup> nor shall you favour <sup>3</sup> the poor man in his suit.

[a] justice: so Sept.; Heb. om.



- 4 When you come upon your enemy's ox or ass straying,  
 5 you shall take it back to him. When you see the ass of  
 someone who hates you lying helpless under its load,  
 however unwilling you may be to help it, you must give  
 him a hand with it.
- 6 You shall not deprive the poor man of justice in his  
 7 suit. Avoid all lies, and do not cause the death of the  
 innocent and the guiltless; for I the LORD will never acquit  
 8 the guilty. You shall not accept a bribe, for bribery makes  
 the discerning man blind and the just man give a crooked  
 answer.
- 9 You shall not oppress the alien, for you know how it  
 feels to be an alien; you were aliens yourselves in Egypt.

\* The laws set out here all concern behaviour in the conduct of legal cases. They are directed to every Israelite citizen who might find himself involved in a legal dispute in some way, and not just to an order of professional judges. They demand a standard of behaviour which formed a necessary precondition for the proper administration of justice.

23: 1. *a baseless rumour*: the context here shows that what is in mind is more than mere unjustified comments and criticisms, but a positive accusation that a crime has been committed which has no foundation in known fact. An excellent illustration is furnished by the case recounted in 1 Kings 21: 8 ff., where Jezebel wrote false evidence in Ahab's name against Naboth, and brought about his death.

2. *You shall not be led into wrongdoing*: strict impartiality and truthfulness is demanded in giving evidence at law. There must be no yielding to the wishes of a majority, nor even an unjustified favouritism for a poor man on account of his poverty.

4, 5. *your enemy's ox or ass*: these demands for consideration of an enemy's property are out of place in a series of laws

dealing with behaviour in a court of law. They have been introduced at this point because it is assumed that the *enemy* is a person with whom the hearer has a legal dispute. Such a situation must not be allowed to interfere with normal conduct towards a neighbour and his property.

7. *Avoid all lies*: the evidence of witnesses was the fundamental requirement in law for obtaining a conviction. A lying witness could therefore undermine the whole process of law. Similarly bribery could tempt even an otherwise intelligent and just man into giving lying evidence, or into accepting an unjust verdict. \*

## LAWS CONCERNING WORSHIP

For six years you may sow your land and gather its <sup>10</sup> produce; but in the seventh year you shall let it lie fallow <sup>11</sup> and leave it alone. It shall provide food for the poor of your people, and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard and your olive-grove.

For six days you may do your work, but on the seventh <sup>12</sup> day you shall abstain from work, so that your ox and your ass may rest, and your home-born slave and the alien may refresh themselves.

Be attentive to every word of mine. You shall not in- <sup>13</sup> voke other gods: your lips shall not speak their names.

Three times a year you shall keep a pilgrim-feast to me. <sup>14</sup> You shall celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread <sup>15</sup> for seven days; you shall eat unleavened cakes as I have commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

No one shall come into my presence<sup>a</sup> empty-handed. <sup>16</sup>

[a] *Lit.* see my face...



You shall celebrate the pilgrim-feast of Harvest, with the firstfruits of your work in sowing the land, and the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering at the end<sup>a</sup> of the year, when you bring in the fruits of all your work on the land.

17 These three times a year shall all your males come into the presence of<sup>b</sup> the LORD God.

18 You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice at the same time as anything leavened.

The fat of my festal offering shall not remain overnight till morning.

19 You shall bring the choicest firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

\* This section carries the collection of laws forward to deal with questions of worship and the observance of holy times and holy places. The first part, in verses 10-13, deals with the demand for a sabbath year of rest for the land once in every seven years, and a sabbath day of rest in which everyone is to participate, once in every seven days. This is rounded off by a general warning not to pay regard to other gods (verse 13). The second part, in verses 14-19, lays down the minimum number of festival occasions in which Israelite men are to offer worship to the LORD, and demands also a basic minimum of festival offerings. The particular times chosen for the pilgrim-feasts reflect the seasons of the agricultural year, and the nature of the offerings that are to be brought also reflects the crop-farming economy of the settled land. It is certain, therefore, that this pattern of the religious year, with its set pilgrim-feasts, reflects life in the land of Canaan. It has been brought forward to be included in the revelation of God's laws at Sinai in order to affirm Israel's undivided obligation to the LORD, the God of Sinai.

[a] Or beginning; *lit.* going out. [b] *Lit.* see the face of...

11. *in the seventh year*: the institution of a fallow year for the land is a very ancient practice, and originated out of a religious regard for it as belonging to God. In every seventh year it had to be restored to the original state in which God had given it. This reason now lies hidden in the background, and the more directly social benefit of providing food for the poor, i.e. the non-land-owning members of the people, is placed in the forefront. What they did not take the wild animals were to have since they also formed a part of God's ordering of the natural world. It is not clear whether all the land of a whole region was subject to the same seven-year sabbath, or whether some system of rotation of fields was used.

12. *For six days you may do your work*: for the sabbath law see on 20: 8-11. Surprisingly the seventh day, as a day of rest, is not expressly called the sabbath here. As in the case of the 'sabbath' year (verses 10-11) a social and humanitarian regard for labourers and beasts of burden is made the purpose of the law, although originally it was no doubt more directly religious, and served as a way of consecrating all time to God.

14. *Three times a year*: the three great pilgrim-feasts formed the basic events of Israel's worship, and each of them reflected some aspect of the agricultural year. They were certainly adopted by Israel at the time after its settlement in the land of Canaan, and its gradual change to an agrarian economy. In this process each of the feasts came to be associated with the more distinctive religious traditions of Israel's worship of the LORD, so that in time the original agricultural connection became less dominant. Originally the precise days of the month during which the festivals were to be held would have fluctuated slightly with the variation in the seasonal conditions of any one year. For these festivals cp. further Deut. 16: 1-17 and Lev. 23: 1-44, which represent later elaborations of the same three basic occasions.

15. *the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread*: this was celebrated in the spring (March/April) when the first of the new season's cereal crop was harvested. For a period of seven days bread



made from the new grain crop was eaten in its original state, unmixed with leaven, which was normally introduced to produce fermentation. It thus marked the end of dependence on the old season's crop, and the first enjoyment of the new. The prohibition of using leaven was a part of the 'making new' of the year's food supply, since the normal practice was to introduce leaven by saving some of the fermented dough from the previous bake.

No reference is made here to the celebration of Passover, which was celebrated with the feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring. Cp. Deut. 16: 1-8, and see above on Exod. 12-13 (p. 71).

16. *No one shall come into my presence empty-handed*: this is a general requirement for the observance of worship of the LORD, which laid down that in every act of worship entailing a visit to a sanctuary, an offering should be brought to him. The phrase *come into my presence* means literally 'see my face', although this was weakened in a conventional Jewish interpretative translation to 'appear before'. Such a phrase originated outside Israel where 'seeing the face of God' meant literally seeing an image of him, but this was taken over by Israel as a normal expression for visiting a sanctuary, where in Israel's case no image was to be found.

*the pilgrim-feast of Harvest*: this took place at the end of the corn harvest. Later, when the interval of time for its celebration was more precisely fixed at seven weeks after the beginning of the harvest (Deut. 16: 9), it became known as the Feast of Weeks, and in New Testament times it was called Pentecost (Acts 2: 1 ff.).

*the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering*: this referred primarily to the ingathering of fruits, especially olives and grapes, and took place at the end of the agricultural year in the early autumn. In early Israel this was the time at which the old year ended, and from which the beginning of the new year was reckoned. The end of the harvest and the gathering of crops marked the end of one year, and the onset of the autumn rains heralded

the beginning of the new. In Deut. 16: 13-15 this feast is given the title feast of Tabernacles, and Jesus' presence at this feast is described in John 7: 2 ff.

18. *You shall not offer...anything leavened*: this ruling is rather difficult to place in its proper context, since for certain sacrifices the offering of leavened bread was not only permitted, but was required (Lev. 7: 13; 23: 17).

19. *You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk*: this peculiar practice was current among Israel's Canaanite neighbours, so that its prohibition to Israel was out of regard for the avoidance of alien religious rites. The exact purpose of the practice itself is uncertain, but it was no doubt thought to induce fertility, perhaps by simulating the milk of the mother-goddess. In later Jewish tradition this law led to the avoidance of eating meat and drinking milk at the same meal; a scruple which is still observed by many Jews. \*

#### EPILOGUE TO THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

And now I send an angel before you to guard you on your way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Take heed of him and listen to his voice. Do not defy him; he will not pardon your rebelliousness, for my authority rests in him. If you will only listen to his voice and do all I tell you, then I will be an enemy to your enemies, and I will harass those who harass you. My angel will go before you and bring you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will make an end of them. You are not to bow down to their gods, nor worship them, nor observe their rites, but you shall tear down all their images and smash their sacred pillars. Worship the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water. I will take away all sickness out of your midst. None shall miscarry



or be barren in your land. I will grant you a full span of life.

- 27 I will send my terror before you and throw into confusion all the peoples whom you find in your path. I will  
28 make all your enemies turn their backs. I will spread panic before you to drive out in front of you the Hivites,  
29 the Canaanites and the Hittites. I will not drive them out all in one year, or the land would become waste and the  
30 wild beasts too many for you. I will drive them out little by little until your numbers have grown enough to take  
31 possession of the whole country. I will establish your frontiers from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River. I will give the inhabitants of the country into your power, and you shall  
32 drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant  
33 with them and their gods. They shall not stay in your land for fear they make you sin against me; for then you would worship their gods, and in this way you would be ensnared.

\* The Book of the Covenant, by presenting many laws which refer to, and reflect, conditions of life in the settled land of Canaan, has anticipated the future history of the Israelites gathered at Mount Sinai by looking forward to the situation that was to pertain after the settlement in the land. This shift of viewpoint is now taken account of by an epilogue, added later to the collection of laws, which sets out the prospect that faced Israel as it left Mount Sinai, and set out to march to the promised land to live out the way of life exemplified in the laws that have been given.

As an epilogue to the Book of the Covenant this section is of uncertain date. It presupposes the setting of the laws at Sinai, and has many similarities in style and content to the book of Deuteronomy. Nevertheless it seems at several points

to anticipate, rather than presuppose, our present book of Deuteronomy.

20. *And now I send an angel before you*: the angel of the Lord was a divine messenger and ambassador whose sole task was to fulfil the commission assigned to him by God. The relationship between God and his angel appears so close at times as to border on identity. Yet the angel, rather than God's own presence, is commissioned to accompany Israel in order to preserve the mystery and the distance between God and his people which the divine holiness demanded. We must also remember that in the early period the LORD was especially regarded as the God of Sinai (cp. Judg. 5: 5, 'the LORD, the lord of Sinai') so that Israel's migration to Canaan raised the question of how the God of Sinai could continue to accompany the people when they left the mountain. See further below on 33: 12 ff.

21. *my authority rests in him*: literally 'my name is in him'. God's name was more than merely a title, and summed up the whole nature of God as he was known to men. Hence, as here, God's name given to his messenger implied that the direct personal authority of God rested in him.

23. *and bring you to the Amorites, the Hittites...*: these were the traditional inhabitants of Canaan, usually seven in number. Cp. 3: 8 and comment.

25. *I will take away all sickness out of your midst*: when illness befell an Israelite there was very little professional medical advice or help available, and the normal procedure was simply to pray to God for healing. Cp. Isa. 38: 1 ff. Here the divine healing is extended to include a promise of complete freedom from illness.

27. *I will send my terror before you*: this was a particular gift of God's leadership of Israel's armies in battle. He induced a panic among their enemies which destroyed their will to fight (cp. Gideon's victory over the Midianites in Judg. 7: 9 ff.). The very knowledge that the LORD was fighting for Israel thereby became a cause of terror to her enemies.



29. *I will not drive them out all in one year*: cp. Judg. 1: 28; 2: 21-3. This was written after Israel's settlement, when it was a recognized fact that not all the Canaanite peoples had been killed or driven out. Various explanations were given as to why this had not happened, since God was powerful enough to do so had he so wished.

31. *I will establish your frontiers*: the region outlined formed the maximum extent of the land promised to Israel; cp. Gen. 15: 18-21. It corresponded roughly with the land ruled by David and Solomon in the great empire which David established. The *sea of the Philistines* was the Mediterranean and the *River* was the Euphrates. \*

#### THE COVENANT CEREMONY

24 Then he said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. While you are still at a distance, you are to bow  
2 down; and then Moses shall approach the LORD by himself, but not the others. The people may not go up with him at all.'

3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, all his laws. The whole people answered with one voice and said, 'We will do all that the LORD has told us.'

4 Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and put up twelve sacred pillars, one for each  
5 of the twelve tribes of Israel. He then sent the young men of Israel and they sacrificed bulls to the LORD as whole-  
6 offerings and shared-offerings. Moses took half the blood and put it in basins and the other half he flung against<sup>a</sup> the  
7 altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it

[a] Or upon.

aloud for all the people to hear. They said, 'We will obey, and do all that the LORD has said.' Moses then took the <sup>8</sup> blood and flung it over the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you on the terms of this book.'

Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and <sup>9</sup> seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw<sup>a</sup> the God of <sup>10</sup> Israel. Under his feet there was, as it were, a pavement of sapphire,<sup>b</sup> clear blue as the very heavens; but the LORD <sup>11</sup> did not stretch out his hand towards the leaders of Israel. They stayed there before God;<sup>c</sup> they ate and they drank. The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the moun- <sup>12</sup> tain, stay there and let me give you the tablets of stone, the law and the commandment, which I have written down that you may teach them.' Moses arose with Joshua <sup>13</sup> his assistant and went up the Mountain of God; he said to <sup>14</sup> the elders, 'Wait for us here until we come back to you. You have Aaron and Hur; if anyone has a dispute, let him go to them.' So Moses went up the mountain and a cloud <sup>15</sup> covered it. The glory of the LORD rested upon Mount <sup>16</sup> Sinai, and the cloud covered the mountain for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. The glory of the LORD looked to the Israelites like a de- <sup>17</sup> vouring fire on the mountain-top. Moses entered the <sup>18</sup> cloud and went up the mountain; there he stayed forty days and forty nights.

\* This entire chapter is concerned with the ratification of the covenant between God and Israel, the terms of which have just been disclosed in the Ten Commandments and the Book

[a] Or they were afraid of. . .

[b] Or lapis lazuli.

[c] Or They saw God; and. . .



of the Covenant. The central feature of this ceremony by which the covenant was formally brought into existence was the eating of a sacred meal in which Moses and his priestly assistants, together with seventy of the elders of Israel, participated (verses 9-11). This meal took place in the very presence of God, and the extraordinary nature of the event is shown by the privilege granted to the elders of Israel of seeing the heavenly throne of God. By eating this meal, and by accepting the obligation to obey the laws written in the Book of the Covenant (verses 3, 7), Israel solemnly entered into the covenant God had made with it. In future any breach of the laws given to it by God would also be a breach of covenant.

The exact sequence of events which the chapter describes, and even the location of the ceremony, whether it took place at the top or the foot of the mountain, are not at first glance clear. This is a result of the composite character of the narrative, which is made up from material drawn from more than one source. The easiest to identify is the P narrative in verses 15*b*-18, which takes up the P account of the Sinai event introduced in 19: 1-2*a*, and which prepares for the long P account of the organization of Israel's worship which extends from 25: 1 to 31: 18.

Verses 3-8 form a supplement to the Book of the Covenant, linking it with the covenant on Sinai by an account of the offering of sacrifices there. Verses 1-2, 9-11 are from the E source, whilst the remaining verses 12-15*a* belong to a separate narrative of the Sinai event which continues in chapters 32 and 34.

24: 1. *Nadab and Abihu*: cp. Exod. 6: 23; Lev. 10: 1. In both of these references, from the P source, Nadab and Abihu appear as the sons of Aaron. This is not stated in the passage here which is from an earlier source. The seventy elders of Israel act as representatives of the people, since they cannot all go up the mountain to see God. They are mentioned again in Numbers (cp. Num. 11: 24), which resumes the narrative of events.

4. *and put up twelve sacred pillars*: the standing stone pillar was a common feature of sanctuaries in ancient Palestine. Its significance was variously explained, and here the twelve pillars are no more than symbols of the twelve tribes of Israel, affirming that each one of them had bound itself to obey the covenant.

6. *Moses took half the blood*: the blood was the most meaningful part of a creature. Since its loss meant a loss of life, the blood was itself regarded as containing this life, and therefore as belonging in a very special way to God (Lev. 17: 10-13). Blood could not therefore be eaten, and was normally given back to God by being poured out at an altar. Here the flinging of half the blood over the people established a solemn community of life between them and God. Thus the sharing of life in the covenant between God and Israel was symbolized by the sharing of life in the form of blood.

10. *and they saw the God of Israel*: the reading of the N.E.B. footnote is less probable, although the Old Testament is very reticent about any human claim to have seen God. Cp. Exod. 33: 20; Deut. 4: 12, 15; Judg. 13: 22. It is noteworthy that in the description of what was seen here we are only told what was under God's feet. Other references to 'seeing' God clearly refer to visionary experiences (e.g. Isa. 6: 7; Ezek. 1: 26; Dan. 7: 9) and these must be regarded rather differently. In Matt. 5: 8 the phrase indicates the greatest possible blessing that a man can have, and has taken on a very distinctive spiritual meaning.

*a pavement of sapphire*: this was a pictorial way of describing God as enthroned above the heavens, since the sapphire was intended to represent the sky. It may be that painted, or glazed, pavements were known in ancient Israel, especially as part of the ornamentation of a sanctuary.

11. *but the LORD did not stretch out his hand*: i.e. he did not kill the men who had dared to look at him. Cp. Exod. 19: 12. By coming at divine invitation, and after taking the proper precautions (19: 15), God granted to Israel's representatives



the extraordinary privilege of witnessing his presence at the top of Sinai.

*they ate and they drank*: a meal shared together was the fullest evidence of human friendship and trust, and so this communion meal affirmed the reality of the relationship between Israel and God, even though God himself could not share in it; cp. Ps. 50: 12-13. He witnessed the sacrificial meal enjoyed by the elders.

12. *the tablets of stone*: for the first time we learn that the law given at Sinai was inscribed on tablets of stone. The assumption is that what was written on the tablets was the Ten Commandments given in 20: 2-17, probably with five of the laws on each tablet. Exod. 32: 15 states that the tablets were inscribed on both the front and back, which would have been unusual. The mention of the tablets here prepares for the part they play in the narrative of chapter 32.

14. *Aaron and Hur*: cp. 17: 10, 12.

16. *The glory of the LORD*: the P account of what was revealed at Sinai begins in verse 15*b*, resuming from 19: 1-2*a*. It is wholly characteristic of this source that the cloud which accompanies Israel (see on 14: 19-20) is called God's glory. This represents God's presence and shows many of the characteristic features of God himself. Nevertheless it is not to be wholly identified with him, and is intended to affirm that his presence was with Israel, without lessening the idea of his divine majesty and heavenly sovereignty. \*

#### PREPARATIONS FOR THE MAKING OF A SANCTUARY

25 1,2 **T**he LORD spoke to Moses and said: Tell the Israelites  
to set aside a contribution for me; you shall accept  
3 whatever contribution each man shall freely offer. This is  
4 what you shall accept: gold, silver, copper; violet, purple,  
5 and scarlet yarn; fine linen and goats' hair; tanned rams'

skins, porpoise<sup>a</sup>-hides, and acacia-wood; oil for the lamp, <sup>6</sup> balsam for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; cornelian and other stones ready for setting in the ephod <sup>7</sup> and the breast-piece.<sup>b</sup> Make me a sanctuary, and I will <sup>8</sup> dwell among them. Make it exactly according to the <sup>9</sup> design I show you, the design for the Tabernacle and for all its furniture. This is how you must make it:

\* With chapter 25 we have the beginning of the account of the extensive instructions for the making of a Tabernacle, which is to be the primary sanctuary of Israel. These instructions continue as far as chapter 31. Then in chapters 35-40 we are told, in an account deriving from the same source, how these instructions were fulfilled, and the Tabernacle erected. The purpose of the Tabernacle is expressed in 25: 8: 'and I [God] will dwell among them [Israel]'. Thus it is a sanctuary for the presence of God, and this presence is realized by the cloud of God's glory which covers the Tabernacle when it is erected (40: 34-8).

The making of the Tabernacle is a central theme of the whole P source. Its erection, according to God's instructions, represents the main feature of the Sinai revelation. By it, according to P, the promise made to Abraham that God Almighty would be the God of Israel (Gen. 17: 8) was brought to realization. Distinctively therefore, instead of speaking of the Sinai event as another covenant, besides that made with Abraham, this source regards it as the way by which the covenant made with Abraham was fulfilled. Whereas the earlier sources introduce at Sinai laws of a predominantly ethical and social nature, those given in P are almost entirely concerned with the organization and administration of worship. It is from this fact that it has received its description as a 'Priestly' document.

The Tabernacle which is described is fundamentally a port-

[a] *Strictly sea-cow.*

[b] *Or pouch.*



able temple, called a tent, but in fact furnished far more elaborately than any portable tent-shrine, for use in the desert, could possibly have been. It is certain, therefore, that the P source, which is from a comparatively late date, stemming roughly from the period of the return from exile in the late sixth century B.C., has drawn upon recollections of Solomon's temple, with all its elaborate furnishings. There is also a certain tendency to 'idealize' the temple in P's description of the Tabernacle, which was written after the temple built by Solomon had been destroyed, and when the building of a new sanctuary in Jerusalem was eagerly awaited (Isa. 44: 28).

Yet this account of the Tabernacle is neither wholly anachronistic nor fictitious, projecting back into the past an institution which did not come into existence until Solomon's time. There was a tent sanctuary in early Israel, called the Tent of the Presence (see 33: 7-11), which antedated Solomon's temple, and which goes back to the period when the tribes of Israel were settling into the land of Canaan. The P author has undoubtedly drawn upon his knowledge of the existence of this, but has pictured it as furnished much like the later temple, and has further introduced symbols and ideas of God's presence which reflect the experience in which the first temple had been destroyed, and when Israel had had to learn how to worship God in a land of exile.

25: 2. *a contribution for me*: verses 2-9 describe the collecting of the materials for the construction of the Tabernacle, presenting them as an offering made voluntarily by Israel in loyalty to, and love for, God. Thus a spiritual attitude of unselfish giving is put at the very beginning of the foundation of Israelite worship. The costly, and sometimes rare, materials used, some of them needing to be brought from distant lands, would not have been readily available in the desert to refugees from slave labour service in Egypt. Nevertheless the author permits himself this exaggeration in order to set out a worthy conception of God's sanctuary.

5. *porpoise-hides* (Heb. *teḥāshīm*): the precise reference is to

the hide of the Dugong, which is the sea-cow, and is related to the Manatee, as the N.E.B. footnote shows. The particular species of *Dugong dugong* is found both in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

7. *the ephod and the breast-piece*: see on 28: 6 ff. for these items of priestly dress.

9. *according to the design I show you*: Israel's worship was not to be a human achievement, but was to follow out precisely the plans and instructions given by God. Thus the worship by which Israel enjoyed the continued presence of God in its midst was itself a gift of God. True worship, instead of being a demand made by God upon men, is here seen as his gift to them by which they are privileged to enjoy communion with him. Only God knows the right way in which he wishes to be approached, and by this insistence on God's revelation of the design of his sanctuary, all merely human innovations are excluded.

*the design for the Tabernacle*: the Tabernacle was a tent, and the Hebrew word used here for it denotes a special tent that had been set aside for religious purposes. This was translated into Latin as *tabernaculum*, which could refer to a tent used either for ordinary, or specifically religious, purposes. Israel's sacred tent was to be a portable shrine, erected in the centre of Israel's camp (cp. Num. 2: 1 ff.), to house the furnishings used in worship. The Canaanites, who themselves mainly lived in brick or stone houses in cities, also sometimes described God's dwelling as a tent, no doubt thereby reflecting a religious conservatism which held to a picture of early social conditions when describing the divine world. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ARK

Make an Ark, a chest of acacia-wood, two and a half<sup>10</sup> cubits long, one cubit and a half wide, and one cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold both inside and out,<sup>11</sup> and put a band of gold all round it. Cast four gold rings<sup>12</sup>



for it, and fasten them to its four feet, two rings on each  
 13 side. Make poles of acacia-wood and plate them with gold,  
 14 and insert the poles in the rings at the sides of the Ark to  
 15 lift it. The poles shall remain in the rings of the Ark and  
 16 never be removed. Put into the Ark the Tokens of the  
 17 Covenant,<sup>a</sup> which I shall give you. Make a cover of pure  
 gold, two and a half cubits long and one cubit and a half  
 18 wide. Make two gold cherubim of beaten work at the  
 19 ends of the cover, one at each end; make each cherub of  
 20 one piece with the cover. They shall be made with wings  
 outspread and pointing upwards, and shall screen the  
 cover with their wings. They shall be face to face, looking  
 21 inwards over the cover. Put the cover above the Ark, and  
 22 put into the Ark the Tokens that I shall give you. It is  
 there that I shall meet you, and from above the cover,  
 between the two cherubim over the Ark of the Tokens,  
 I shall deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

\* The first of the furnishings of the Tabernacle to be described is the Ark, although when the actual construction is carried out the Tabernacle itself is naturally made first (36: 8 ff.). By its position of priority the Ark was clearly regarded as the most important of Israel's sanctuary furnishings. This is because the Ark was both the container for the tablets of law given in the covenant (verse 16), and also the place of the divine presence, where God himself was to meet with Israel (verse 22).

The Ark was a very ancient institution of Israel's religion, and the earliest references to it indicate that it was carried out into battle as a symbol of God's leadership of Israel's armies (Num. 10: 35-6; cp. 1 Sam. 4: 4-11). Its name shows it to have been a box (cp. Gen. 50: 26, where the same word is

[a] Tokens of the Covenant: or Testimony.

used of Joseph's coffin, and 2 Kings 12: 10 f., where it refers to a collecting-box in the temple). Many scholars have suggested that the Ark was intended to symbolize the throne of God, upon which he was regarded as (invisibly) seated. This is far from certain, and the name suggests rather a container of some kind. Besides the present passage, Deut. 10: 2 and 1 Kings 8: 9 state that it contained the two tablets of law, although this tradition is only found comparatively late in the known history of the Ark. Still later Jewish tradition believed that it also contained a pot of manna and the rod of Aaron (cp. Heb. 9: 4).

David brought the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6: 1-19) and Solomon set it in the inner shrine of the temple there (1 Kings 8: 6-9). It was presumably destroyed along with the temple in 587 B.C. (2 Kings 25: 9). This Ark was apparently quite a simple wooden affair, with little, if any, ornamentation. The present P author has drawn upon recollections of this Ark, but has pictured it as a much more richly ornamented construction.

10. *Make an Ark*: the Hebrew word (*'ārōn*) means a box, and has no connection with the word used for Noah's ark (*tēbā*, Gen. 6: 14 ff.). In a modern synagogue it refers to the cupboard where the scrolls of the law are kept.

*two and a half cubits long*: the cubit was the length of the forearm from the tip of the fingers to the elbow. It normally measured about eighteen inches, although the measurement was never completely standardized.

11. *Overlay it with pure gold*: in this feature the author certainly departs from the historical Ark of early Israel which was made of plain wood.

16. *the Tokens of the Covenant*: both R.V. and R.S.V. have 'testimony', and the full explanation and meaning of the term are far from clear, although the reference is clearly to the two tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them (Exod. 24: 12; Deut. 10: 2; 1 Kings 8: 9). These constituted the laws, or tokens, of the covenant. The Hebrew word used



(*'ēdūt*) perhaps means 'covenant', or something very similar, and appears here in order to reserve the usual word for 'covenant' (Heb. *berīt*) for God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 17: 1 ff.).

17. *Make a cover of pure gold*: earlier versions have 'mercy-seat' because the Hebrew word used (*kappōrēt*) is related to a verb (*kippēr*) meaning 'to cover', and hence 'to make atonement for, to absolve'. However, the more concrete meaning of 'cover' is appropriate here since this is what is actually described.

18. *Make two gold cherubim*: the cherubim of Solomon's temple were large wooden figures, set in the inner sanctuary of the temple with their wings covering the Ark (1 Kings 8: 7). They represented the heavenly guardians of God's throne (cp. Gen. 3: 24) and the creatures who drew his chariot through the sky (Ps. 18: 10; Ezek. 10: 1 ff.). Their appearance is not certainly described, but the likelihood is that they were regarded as composite creatures, with the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle and possibly a human face. Here the author describes the cherubim as small gold figures set at each side of the cover of the Ark.

22. *I shall deliver to you all my commands*: the Tokens of the Covenant represent God's basic commands, but from time to time these would need to be supplemented by instructions and decisions obtained through the priestly use of the divine oracle. See on 28: 30 for the Urim and Thummim. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABLE

23 Make a table of acacia-wood, two cubits long, one cubit  
24 wide, and one cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure  
25 gold, and put a band of gold all round it. Make a rim  
round it a hand's breadth wide, and a gold band round  
26 the rim. Make four gold rings for the table, and put the  
27 rings at the four corners by the legs. The rings, which are  
to receive the poles for carrying the table, must be adja-

cent to the rim. Make the poles of acacia-wood and plate<sup>28</sup> them with gold; they are to be used for carrying the table. Make its dishes and saucers, and its flagons and bowls from<sup>29</sup> which drink-offerings may be poured: make them of pure gold. Put the Bread of the Presence<sup>a</sup> on the table, to be<sup>30</sup> always before me.

\* The sanctuary also required a table upon which the non-animal offerings brought to God could be placed. The chief of these was the Bread of the Presence, which maintained a very old custom of setting out loaves of bread before God. Besides such offerings set upon the table it also provided a place for various golden pots and vessels, including those used for the libations. The table that is described here is a simple rectangular structure set on four legs.

26. *Make four gold rings for the table*: the table, like the whole Tabernacle, is to be made readily portable, as a shrine suitable for an unsettled people wandering in the desert.

30. *Put the Bread of the Presence*: the N.E.B. footnote has Shewbread. This consisted of loaves of bread set out in the presence of the deity and renewed regularly. Lev. 24: 5-9 contains specific regulations. The custom originated at a time when such offerings were thought to provide food for the deity, but any such interpretation disappeared in Israel, with its more spiritual conception of God. Nevertheless, the practice of setting out loaves of bread in the sanctuary was retained, no doubt as an expression of the consecration of all man's food by God. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LAMPSTAND

Make a lamp-stand of pure gold. The lamp-stand, stem<sup>31</sup> and branches, shall be of beaten work, its cups, both calyxes and petals, shall be of one piece with it. There are<sup>32</sup>

[a] Or Shewbread.



to be six branches springing from its sides; three branches of the lamp-stand shall spring from the one side and  
33 three branches from the other side. There shall be three cups shaped like almond blossoms, with calyx and petals, on the first branch, three cups shaped like almond blossoms, with calyx and petals, on the next branch, and similarly for all six branches springing from the lamp-  
34 stand. On the main stem of the lamp-stand there are to be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, with calyx and  
35 petals, and there shall be calyxes of one piece with it under the six branches which spring from the lamp-stand, a single  
36 calyx under each pair of branches. The calyxes and the branches are to be of one piece with it, all a single piece  
37 of beaten work of pure gold. Make seven lamps for this and mount them to shed light over the space in front of it.  
38, 39 Its tongs and firepans shall be of pure gold. The lamp-stand and all these fittings shall be made from one talent  
40 of pure gold. See that you work to the design which you were shown on the mountain.

\* The instructions given here for the making of the distinctive seven-branched lamp-stand are quite complicated, but the main pattern is well known from the portrayal on the Arch of Titus in Rome of a similar lamp-stand captured from the Herodian temple in Jerusalem. It consisted of one main central stem, with three branches on each side extending outwards. On the Arch of Titus these branches are shown as curved, although it is possible that earlier models of such a lamp had straight branches. Each of the side branches had burners shaped into three cups like almond blossom, and the central stand had a burner shaped into four cups. Such a lamp was necessary for the otherwise dark sanctuary, and no doubt at one time it was the subject of elaborate explanations in terms

of God's gift of light (Gen. 1: 3-5). Any such symbolic interpretation is entirely unmentioned here, and the purpose of the lamp-stand is purely functional.

31. *its cups, both calyxes and petals*: the lamp was fed by oil drawn through the pipes which formed its stem and branches. Its calyxes, or flower-cups, formed the burners, which were shaped like clusters of almond blossom, and the wicks were held in these.

37. *and mount them*: apparently the lamps could be so arranged in their holders that the light they gave was thrown forward.

39. *one talent of pure gold*: there was no completely standard weight for the talent, but it may be reckoned as approximately 29 kilograms. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABERNACLE

Make the Tabernacle of ten hangings of finely woven **26** linen, and violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked on them, all made by a seamster. The length of **2** each hanging shall be twenty-eight cubits and the breadth four cubits; all are to be of the same size. Five of the **3** hangings shall be joined together, and similarly the other five. Make violet loops along the edge of the last hanging **4** in each set, fifty for each set; they must be opposite one **5** another. Make fifty gold fasteners, join the hangings one **6** to another with them, and the Tabernacle will be a single whole.

Make hangings of goats' hair, eleven in all, to form **7** a tent over the Tabernacle; each hanging is to be thirty **8** cubits long and four wide; all eleven are to be of the same size. Join five of the hangings together, and similarly the **9** other six; then fold the sixth hanging double at the front of the tent. Make fifty loops on the edge of the last hang- **10**



ing in the first set and make fifty loops on the joining edge  
 11 of the second set. Make fifty bronze<sup>a</sup> fasteners, insert them  
 into the loops and join up the tent to make it a single  
 12 whole. The additional length of the tent hanging<sup>b</sup> is to  
 13 fall over the back of the Tabernacle. On each side there  
 will be an additional cubit in the length of the tent hang-  
 ings; this shall fall over the two sides of the Taber-  
 14 nacle to cover it. Make for the tent a cover of tanned  
 rams' skins and an outer covering of porpoise-hides.

15 Make for the Tabernacle planks of acacia-wood as up-  
 16 rights, each plank ten cubits long and a cubit and a half  
 17 wide, and two tenons for each plank joined to each other.

You shall do the same for all the planks of the Tabernacle.  
 18 Arrange the planks thus: twenty planks for the south side,  
 19 facing southwards, with forty silver sockets under them,  
 20 two sockets under each plank for its two tenons; and for  
 the second or northern side of the Tabernacle, twenty  
 21 planks, with forty silver sockets, two under each plank.  
 22 Make six planks for the far end of the Tabernacle on the  
 23 west. Make two planks for the corners of the Tabernacle  
 24 at the far end; at the bottom they shall be alike, and at the  
 top, both alike,<sup>c</sup> they shall fit into a single ring. Do the  
 same for both of them; they shall be for the two corners.  
 25 There shall be eight planks with their silver sockets, six-  
 teen sockets in all, two sockets under each plank severally.  
 26 Make bars of acacia-wood: five for the planks on  
 27 the one side of the Tabernacle, five for the planks on the  
 other side and five for the planks on the far end of the

[a] Or copper and so throughout the description of the Tabernacle.

[b] Prob. *rdg.*; Heb. adds half the hanging which remains over.

[c] So Sam.; Heb. perfect.

Tabernacle on the west. The middle bar is to run along<sup>28</sup> from end to end half-way up the planks. Overlay the<sup>29</sup> planks with gold, make rings of gold on them to hold the bars, and plate the bars with gold. Set up the Tabernacle<sup>30</sup> according to the design you were shown on the mountain.

Make a Veil of finely woven linen and violet, purple,<sup>31</sup> and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked on it, all made by a seamster. Fasten it with hooks of gold to four posts<sup>32</sup> of acacia-wood overlaid with gold, standing in four silver sockets. Hang the Veil below the fasteners and bring the<sup>33</sup> Ark of the Tokens inside the Veil. Thus the Veil will make a clear separation for you between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Place the cover over the Ark of the<sup>34</sup> Tokens in the Holy of Holies. Put the table outside the<sup>35</sup> Veil and the lamp-stand at the south side of the Tabernacle, opposite the table which you shall put at the north side. For the entrance of the tent make a screen of finely<sup>36</sup> woven linen, embroidered with violet, purple, and scarlet. Make five posts of acacia-wood for the screen and over-<sup>37</sup>lay them with gold; make golden hooks for them and cast five bronze sockets for them.

\* The Tabernacle itself, in which the newly established worship of the LORD by Israel is to be continued, is now described. The description falls into three parts, the first of which (verses 1-14) details the covering materials, consisting of an inner layer of ten hangings of finely woven linen, on top of which was placed a series of eleven hangings of woven goats' hair, the normal material for a nomad's tent. These were to be protected by two further layers of tanned rams' skins and porpoise hides (verse 14). The main hangings of expensive linen were to be embroidered.



In verses 15-30 the instructions for the woodwork, which is to form the framework upon which the outer hangings are hung, are given. This structure is to be formed from planks of acacia-wood set upright, and joined together by tenons set in silver sockets. The exact method of fitting together is not very clear.

Finally, in verses 31-7 instructions are set out for making a veil, which is to divide the main hall of the Tabernacle, into which the congregation can come, from the Holy of Holies (verse 33). This veil thereby assumes a very special significance as establishing a separation between Israel and the presence of God, represented by the cloud of the divine glory over the Ark.

Throughout the description of the Tabernacle, the building, although it is to be very costly and beautiful, remains purely functional, and no symbolic interpretation of either the whole, or the various separate parts, is given. This contrasts markedly with the highly elaborate symbolism relating to temple architecture and furnishings in the ancient Near East generally, and which also enjoyed great popularity in later Judaism (cp. the Epistle to the Hebrews). This absence of symbolic interpretation in the description of the Tabernacle was certainly intentional, so that the building simply fulfils the task of providing a portable shrine for the presence of God which is to accompany Israel (25: 22; 29: 45-6). The more speculative aspects of religious symbolism are firmly suppressed.

26: 1. *with cherubim worked on them*: for the form of the cherubim, see above on 25: 18. The walls of the inner rooms of Solomon's temple were decorated with carvings of cherubim (1 Kings 6: 29, 32, 35) and the knowledge of this has been read back by the author into his description of the earlier tent of the desert period. As heavenly creatures they formed a suitable motif with which to decorate a divine abode.

7. *to form a tent over the Tabernacle*: a nomad's tent was normally woven from goats' hair, and the word 'tent' used here is that for such a private dwelling.

8. *all eleven are to be of the same size*: since eleven hangings of goats' hair are to be placed over ten hangings of finely woven linen, allowance is made for a considerable overlap which must largely have been taken up by folding back the front hanging double. Some considerable importance appears to have been attached to keeping the hangings all the same size, no doubt because such symmetry implied wholeness.

18. *twenty planks for the south side*: from the directions given, the Tabernacle was to face east, although no symbolic significance is attached to this.

31. *Make a Veil*: this separated the Holy of Holies from the main hall into which the worshippers came. In Mark 15: 38 it was rent in two at the death of Jesus.

33. *between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies*: Solomon's temple, like many other ancient temples of the Near East, had a main hall, or sanctuary, and an inner shrine (1 Kings 6: 17, 19, 20). This is now reflected in the plan of the Tabernacle, but the inner shrine is renamed the Holy of Holies, or Most Holy Place. Such a title introduces a conception of degrees of holiness, to which the P source attaches importance. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ALTAR AND THE COURT

Make the altar of acacia-wood; it shall be square, five **27** cubits long by five cubits broad and three cubits high. Let its horns at the four corners be of one piece with it, <sup>2</sup> and overlay it with bronze. Make for it pots to take away <sup>3</sup> the fat and the ashes, with shovels, tossing bowls, forks, and firepans, all of bronze. Make a grating for it of bronze <sup>4</sup> network, and fit four bronze rings on the network at its four corners. Put it below the ledge of the altar, so that the <sup>5</sup> network comes half-way up the altar. Make poles of <sup>6</sup> acacia-wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. They shall be inserted in the rings at both sides of the <sup>7</sup>



- 8 altar to carry it. Leave the altar a hollow shell. As you were shown on the mountain, so shall it be made.
- 9 Make the court of the Tabernacle. For the one side, the south side facing southwards, the court shall have hangings of finely woven linen a hundred cubits long, with twenty posts and twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks and bands on the posts shall be of silver. Similarly all along the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, with twenty posts and twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks and bands on the posts shall be of silver. For the breadth of the court, on the west side, there shall be hangings fifty cubits long, with ten posts and ten sockets.
- 13 On the east side, towards the sunrise, which was fifty cubits, hangings shall extend fifteen cubits from one corner, with three posts and three sockets, and hangings shall extend fifteen cubits from the other corner, with three posts and three sockets. At the gateway of the court, there shall be a screen twenty cubits long of finely woven linen embroidered with violet, purple, and scarlet, with four posts and four sockets. The posts all round the court shall have bands of silver, with hooks of silver, and sockets of bronze. The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty,<sup>a</sup> and the height five cubits, with finely woven linen and bronze sockets throughout.
- 19 All the equipment needed for serving the Tabernacle, all its pegs and those of the court, shall be of bronze.
- 20 You yourself are to command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of pounded olives ready for the regular mounting of the lamp. In the Tent of the Presence<sup>b</sup> outside the Veil that hides the Tokens, Aaron and his sons

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. adds by fifty.*[b] *Or Tent of Meeting.*

shall keep the lamp in trim from dusk to dawn before the LORD. This is a rule binding on their descendants among the Israelites for all time.

\* We now have instructions for the remainder of the Tabernacle buildings, comprising an altar (verses 1-8) and a court (verses 9-19). The ordering of both features reflects the arrangement in the temple of Solomon where permanent structures made of stone existed. Here, in agreement with the entire character of the Tabernacle, these structures have been made portable and are to be constructed of wood and metal, and the court itself is marked off by hangings made from finely woven linen. In the case of the altar with its wooden construction, the idealizing tendency of the author is very noticeable, since such an altar would scarcely have survived the heat needed to consume a whole-offering. Nevertheless, the author is authentic in presenting Israel's worship from the days of Sinai as including sacrifices and whole-offerings. The arrangement of the court also affirms the widespread practice of marking off a sacred area around a sanctuary, separating it from the surrounding world by a screen of some kind.

27: 1. *Make the altar of acacia-wood*: in the ancient world altars were almost universally made either of stones (cp. 20: 25) or of a heap of banked-up earth (cp. 20: 24). The wooden structure of the altar of the Tabernacle here is entirely a concession to the need for portability, and even though it was to be overlaid with bronze it would not have been sufficiently protected from the heat of the fire upon it to fulfil its purpose. Its size also is remarkably small when compared with the altar of whole-offering described by Ezekiel (Ezek. 43: 13 ff.). Only one altar is to be made for the Tabernacle, and this follows the pattern of an altar of whole-offering.

2. *Let its horns*: ancient altars had horns projecting upwards at each corner so that the sacrificial beast could be held firmly in position, whilst allowing a draught for the fire to burn underneath. They symbolized the protection of the altar to



which an accused person could flee (cp. Joab's flight to the altar in Jerusalem, 1 Kings 2: 28 ff. and see on Exod. 21: 14).

4. *Make a grating for it of bronze network*: the altar itself is to be held within a framework of bronze grating in such a way that the top of the grating catches on to a ledge jutting out from its sides about halfway up.

9. *Make the court of the Tabernacle*: this was to consist of a large rectangular area, measuring 50 by 100 cubits, marked off by linen hangings held up by posts. The Tabernacle itself is to stand in the area at the far side of this.

19. *all its pegs*: nothing has previously been said about the pegs, but it is assumed that they will be necessary to hold the hangings in place.

21. *In the Tent of the Presence*: verses 20 and 21 form a general appendix to the instructions for the making of the Tabernacle, which for the first time is called here *the Tent of the Presence*. This appears to have been a genuinely old title for a tent-shrine used by certain of Israel's tribes at an early period (see below on 33: 7-11). The exact meaning of the title is obscure, and the N.E.B. footnote follows earlier versions in reading 'Tent of Meeting'. The Hebrew 'Tent of *mō'ēd*' may mean simply 'Festival Tent', since *mō'ēd* is regularly used for 'season' and the religious festivals which accompanied them (cp. Gen. 1: 14).

*shall keep the lamp in trim*: rather surprisingly it is stated here that the lamp is only to be kept burning during the hours of darkness. Cp. 1 Sam. 3: 3. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PRIESTLY CLOTHING

- 28** You yourself are to summon to your presence your brother Aaron and his sons out of all the Israelites to serve as my priests: Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu, <sup>2</sup> Eleazar and Ithamar. For your brother Aaron make <sup>3</sup> sacred vestments, to give him dignity and grandeur. Tell

all the craftsmen whom I have endowed with skill to make the vestments for the consecration of Aaron as my priest. These are the vestments they shall make: a breast-piece, <sup>4</sup> an ephod, a mantle, a chequered tunic, a turban, and a sash. They shall make sacred vestments for Aaron your brother and his sons to wear when they serve as my priests, using gold; violet, purple, and scarlet yarn; and <sup>5</sup> fine linen.

The ephod shall be made of gold, and with violet, <sup>6</sup> purple, and scarlet yarn, and with finely woven linen worked by a seamster. It shall have two shoulder-pieces <sup>7</sup> joined back and front. The waist-band on it shall be of <sup>8</sup> the same workmanship and material as the fabric of the ephod, and shall be of gold, with violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely woven linen. You shall take two <sup>9</sup> cornelians and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: six of their names on the one stone, and the six <sup>10</sup> other names on the second, all in order of seniority. With <sup>11</sup> the skill of a craftsman, a seal-cutter, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in gold rosettes, and fasten them on the <sup>12</sup> shoulders of the ephod, as reminders of the sons of Israel. Aaron shall bear their names on his two shoulders as a reminder before the LORD.

Make gold rosettes and two chains of pure gold worked <sup>13, 14</sup> into the form of ropes, and fix them on the rosettes. Make <sup>15</sup> the breast-piece of judgement; it shall be made, like the ephod, by a seamster in gold, with violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely woven linen. It shall be a square <sup>16</sup> folded, a span long and a span wide. Set in it four rows of <sup>17</sup> precious stones: the first row, sardin, chrysolite and green



18 felspar; the second row, purple garnet, lapis lazuli and  
19, 20 jade; the third row, turquoise, agate and jasper; the fourth  
row, topaz, cornelian and green jasper, all set in gold  
21 rosettes. The stones shall correspond to the twelve sons of  
Israel name by name; each stone shall bear the name of  
one of the twelve tribes engraved as on a seal.

22 Make for the breast-piece chains of pure gold worked  
23 into a rope. Make two gold rings, and fix them on the  
24 two upper corners of the breast-piece. Fasten the two  
gold ropes to the two rings at those corners of the breast-  
25 piece, and the other ends of the ropes to the two rosettes,  
thus binding the breast-piece to the shoulder-pieces on the  
26 front of the ephod. Make two gold rings and put them  
at the two lower corners of the breast-piece on the inner  
27 side next to the ephod. Make two gold rings and fix them  
on the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, low down in  
front, along its seam above the waist-band of the ephod.  
28 Then the breast-piece shall be bound by its rings to the  
rings of the ephod with violet braid, just above the waist-  
band of the ephod, so that the breast-piece will not be  
29 detached from the ephod. Thus, when Aaron enters the  
Holy Place, he shall carry over his heart in the breast-piece  
of judgement the names of the sons of Israel, as a constant  
reminder before the LORD.

30 Finally, put the Urim and the Thummim into the  
breast-piece of judgement, and they will be over Aaron's  
heart when he enters the presence of the LORD. So shall  
Aaron bear these symbols of judgement upon the sons of  
Israel over his heart constantly before the LORD.

31 Make the mantle of the ephod a single piece of violet  
32 stuff. There shall be a hole for the head in the middle of it.

All round the hole there shall be a hem of woven work, with an oversewn edge,<sup>a</sup> so that it cannot be torn. All <sup>33</sup> round its skirts make pomegranates of violet, purple, and scarlet stuff, with golden bells between them, a golden <sup>34</sup> bell and a pomegranate alternately the whole way round the skirts of the mantle. Aaron shall wear it when he <sup>35</sup> ministers, and the sound of it shall be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out; and so he shall not die.

Make a rosette of pure gold and engrave on it as on a <sup>36</sup> seal, 'Holy to the LORD'.<sup>b</sup> Fasten it on a violet braid and <sup>37</sup> set it on the very front of the turban. It shall be on <sup>38</sup> Aaron's forehead; he has to bear the blame for shortcomings in the rites with which the Israelites offer their sacred gifts, and the rosette shall be always on his forehead so that they may be acceptable to the LORD.

Make the chequered tunic and the turban of fine linen, <sup>39</sup> but the sash of embroidered work. For Aaron's sons make <sup>40</sup> tunics and sashes; and make tall head-dresses to give them dignity and grandeur. With these invest your brother <sup>41</sup> Aaron and his sons, anoint them, install them and consecrate them;<sup>c</sup> so shall they serve me as priests. Make for <sup>42</sup> them linen drawers reaching to the thighs to cover their private parts; and Aaron and his sons shall wear them <sup>43</sup> when they enter the Tent of the Presence or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place. Thus they will not incur guilt and die. This is a rule binding on him and his descendants for all time.

[a] with an oversewn edge: *lit.* like the opening of a womb.

[b] as... LORD: or 'JEHOVAH' as on a seal in sacred characters.

[c] *Lit.* fill their hands.



\* We are now introduced to the priests of Israel's new sanctuary, who are to be exclusively drawn from Aaron's family. Aaron has the pre-eminent position, equivalent to that of high-priest, although this title is not expressly used. This restriction of Israel's priestly ministry to the family of Aaron represents a late development in the nation's history, which did not come into force until after the exile, probably late in the sixth century B.C. The earlier history of the Aaronid priesthood is far from clear, and it appears that they obtained the exclusive privilege of serving the altar in Jerusalem after the chaos and confusion caused by the exile. Earlier the Jerusalem priesthood had been drawn from the family of Zadok (1 Kings 2: 35; 4: 4; Ezek. 44: 15 ff.). For the earlier history of the tradition regarding Aaron see above on 4: 14, and for the importance of the Levites as priests, see below on 32: 26-9.

The instructions for the clothing of the priests which are given here concern themselves almost entirely with the dress of Aaron, as high-priest. Only in verses 40 and 42 are we told of the dress that was to be worn by Aaron's sons, who represent the ordinary priests. The vestments that Aaron is to wear comprise a breast-piece, an ephod, a mantle, a chequered tunic, a turban and a sash (verse 4). Each of these items of priestly clothing had a very considerable history behind it, and it is evident that the priestly dress was not designed as a whole, to form a uniform ceremonial outfit, but rather that various items of priestly clothing, some of considerable antiquity, had become an important aspect of the priestly inheritance of Israel. Some of these items can be traced back to the royal dress of a king, so that it appears that the description of the high-priest's dress, as given here, has taken over several royal features. This is very probable, and is in line with the tendency evident in Judah after the exile for the high-priest to assume a number of features of the earlier office and dignity of the king.

The purpose of all of the items of the high-priest's clothing

is set out explicitly in verse 2: 'to give him dignity and grandeur'. As the chief mediator between God and Israel it was important that the high-priest's appearance should convey an impression of the beauty and authority that belonged to God himself. Underlying this decorative purpose there is also a functional role that certain of the garments possessed, as in the case of the breast-piece as a pouch to contain the sacred lot, the Urim and Thummim (verse 30). Further, a considerable element of religious symbolism is evident, as for example in the twelve precious stones set on the breast-piece, which ensured that the high-priest always bore the names of all the tribes of Israel before God (verses 17-21). This symbolism was more than mere ornamentation, and was intended to give a measure of realization to the task that the priest performed of bringing Israel's needs before God. Probably this symbolic element was at one time more prominent than it now appears, and, as in the case of the sanctuary as a whole, has been considerably reduced because of the speculative and mythological imagery used in it. Nevertheless, the overall impression conveyed by the description given here is one of striking beauty and colour.

28: 3. *Tell all the craftsmen*: the expression for craftsmen is literally 'wise of heart', indicating the use of 'wise' to describe a person possessing a particular technical or artistic skill. The reference to God's endowing such people with *skill* (literally 'a spirit of wisdom') shows how in Israel, as in the ancient East generally, particular crafts and trades, learnt through family and guild traditions, were ascribed to God as his gift (cp. Isa. 28: 26).

6. *The ephod*: the ephod was the most important item of the clothing of a priest, and was apparently at one time the only substantial item worn (1 Sam. 2: 28; 14: 3; 22: 18). It consisted of a loin-cloth fastened by a strap or belt around the hips. It was probably, at a very distant time, the normal item of dress for everybody. The very elaborate form of ephod described here was fastened by means of two long straps



(shoulder-pieces), upon which two cornelians were to be set, bearing the names of the tribes of Israel.

12. *as a reminder before the LORD*: not primarily to remind Aaron of all the tribes he should serve, but to remind God of all the tribes with whom he had made a covenant. Thus God would not 'forget' to be gracious to Israel, whilst a high-priest served as the mediator of the people, bearing their names before him. Cp. verse 29, where a similar significance attaches to the names of the tribes engraved upon the precious stones set in the breast-piece.

13. *Make gold rosettes*: these were attachment points fixed on to the straps of the ephod from which the breast-piece was hung (verse 25). Although their presence is functional they are nevertheless given a decorative design.

15. *Make the breast-piece of judgement*: the breast-piece (Heb. *hōshēn*) was a pouch for containing the sacred lot, the Urim and Thummim, although the precise etymology of the word is obscure. It was a *breast-piece of judgement* because the lot which was contained in it was used by the priest to obtain oracular decisions, or judgements, from God. By the time of the author here it is doubtful whether the lot was much used, but in earlier times it was employed to obtain a decision on matters which could not otherwise satisfactorily be decided by a legal investigation (cp. 1 Sam. 14: 24 ff. for the use of the lot to discover who has broken an oath).

16. *a span long and a span wide*: about 9 by 9 inches. The span was a handbreadth.

17. *four rows of precious stones*: it is most likely that a breast-piece of this kind consisting of a golden breast-plate set with precious stones was at one time an item of royal dress. It has been adopted by the high-priest and combined with the pouch which contained the Urim and Thummim, which was undoubtedly a part of the priest's equipment from earliest times.

30. *put the Urim and the Thummim*: the derivations of the names Urim and Thummim are obscure, although the R.S.V. footnote translates the present form of the words literally as

'lights and perfections'. They were marked stones of some kind, almost certainly two in number, which a priest could cast to declare a divine oracular decision. They gave the alternatives 'Yes', 'No' and probably also 'No answer'. So *shall Aaron bear these symbols of judgement*: the author here regards the Urim and Thummim primarily as symbols of justice. By wearing them above his heart when he performed his priestly duties, Aaron was to give visible expression to the belief that justice originates from God, and to remind God to watch over the administration of justice in Israel. The earlier practical use of these sacred stones no longer seems to be envisaged.

31. *Make the mantle of the ephod*: the mantle was a large robe, probably sleeveless, but with a hole through which the wearer's head could go. Such robes were worn by kings (1 Sam. 24: 5, 11; 18: 4), but probably also by other prosperous people as a common item of expensive attire.

33. *pomegranates of violet*: the pomegranate was a popular decorative motif. The fruit was popular as a fertility symbol because of its many seeds, but no symbolism of this kind appears to be intended here. The golden bells, attached to the skirt between the pomegranate motifs, certainly originated as devices to ward off evil spirits, but this purpose also is ignored here. Rather they serve to warn God that the person entering the Holy Place is the high-priest, 'and so he shall not die' (verse 35), as a trespasser would do.

36. *Make a rosette*: the rosette was worked in gold and fastened to the high-priest's turban. Its engraved inscription, '*Holy to the LORD*', and the explanation of its purpose (verse 38), show that it was regarded as a protective emblem, warding off evil powers, and compensating for any defects in the conduct of worship which might otherwise bring a harmful infringement of the demands of holiness. That the inscription was to be engraved *as on a seal* refers to the form of the writing in which the older, and more sacred, form of script was to be used.



40. *For Aaron's sons make tunics and sashes:* only here do we begin the inventory of clothing for ordinary priests, and this is given very briefly. It consisted of a tunic, a sash, a high turban and a pair of linen breeches. These latter were to prevent the priests' private parts being exposed when they conducted their priestly duties 'before God'. We may compare 20: 26, which presupposes the situation before such breeches were introduced.

43. *the Tent of the Presence:* cp. on 27: 21. \*

#### THE CONSECRATION OF THE PRIESTS

- 29 In consecrating them to be my priests this is the rite to be observed. Take a young bull and two rams without  
2 blemish. Take unleavened loaves, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil, all  
3 made of wheaten flour; put them in a single basket and bring them in it. Bring also the bull and the two rams.  
4 Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of  
5 the Presence, and wash them with water. Take the vestments and invest Aaron with the tunic, the mantle of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breast-piece, and fasten the  
6 ephod to him with its waist-band. Set the turban on his head, and the symbol of holy dedication on the turban.  
7 Take the anointing oil, pour it on his head and anoint  
8 him. Then bring his sons forward, invest them with tunics,  
9 gird them<sup>a</sup> with the sashes and tie their tall head-dresses on them. They shall hold the priesthood by a rule binding for all time.
- 10 Next you shall install Aaron and his sons. Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of the Presence, and they shall  
11 lay their hands on its head. Slaughter the bull before the

[a] *So Sept.; Heb. adds Aaron and his sons.*

LORD at the entrance to the Tent of the Presence. Take <sup>12</sup> some of its blood, and put it with your finger on the horns of the altar. Pour all the rest<sup>a</sup> of it at the base of the altar. Then take the fat covering the entrails, the long lobe of <sup>13</sup> the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat upon them, and burn it on the altar; but the flesh of the bull, and its skin <sup>14</sup> and offal, you shall destroy by fire outside the camp. It is a sin-offering.

Take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay <sup>15</sup> their hands on its head. Then slaughter it, take its blood <sup>16</sup> and fling it against the sides of the altar. Cut the ram up; <sup>17</sup> wash its entrails and its shins, lay them with the pieces and the head, and burn the whole ram on the altar: it is <sup>18</sup> a whole-offering to the LORD; it is a soothing odour, a food-offering to the LORD.

Take the second ram, and let Aaron and his sons lay <sup>19</sup> their hands on its head. Then slaughter it, take some of <sup>20</sup> its blood, and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, and on their right thumbs and big toes. Fling the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. Take some of the blood which is on the altar and some of <sup>21</sup> the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments, and on his sons and their vestments. So shall he and his vestments, and his sons and their vestments become holy. Take the fat from the ram, the fat-tail, the fat <sup>22</sup> covering the entrails, the long lobe of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat upon them, and the right leg: for it is a ram of installation. Take also one round loaf of bread, <sup>23</sup> one cake cooked with oil, and one wafer from the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD. Set all these <sup>24</sup>

[a] the rest: so *Sept.*; *Heb. om.*



on the hands of Aaron and of his sons and present them as  
25 a special gift before the LORD. Then take them out of their  
hands, and burn them on the altar with the whole-offering  
for a soothing odour to the LORD: it is a food-offering to  
26 the LORD. Take the breast of Aaron's ram of installation,  
present it as a special gift before the LORD, and it shall be  
your perquisite.

27 Hallow the breast of the special gift and the leg of the  
contribution, that which is presented and that which is set  
aside from the ram of installation, that which is for Aaron  
28 and that which is for his sons; and they shall belong to  
Aaron and his sons, by a rule binding for all time, as a  
gift from the Israelites, for it is a contribution, set aside  
from their shared-offerings, their contribution to the LORD.

29 Aaron's sacred vestments shall be kept for the anointing  
30 and installation of his sons after him. The priest appointed  
in his stead from among his sons, the one who enters<sup>a</sup> the  
Tent of the Presence to minister in the Holy Place, shall  
wear them for seven days.

31 Take the ram of installation, and boil its flesh in a  
32 sacred place; Aaron and his sons shall eat the ram's flesh  
and the bread left in the basket, at the entrance to the  
33 Tent of the Presence. They shall eat the things with which  
expiation was made at their installation and their consecra-  
tion. No unqualified person may eat them, for they are  
34 holy. If any of the flesh of the installation, or any of the  
bread, is left over till morning, you shall destroy it by  
fire; it shall not be eaten, for it is holy.

35 Do this with Aaron and his sons as I have commanded  
you, spending seven days over their installation.

[a] *Or when he enters.*

Offer a bull daily, a sin-offering as expiation for sin; <sup>36</sup> offer the sin-offering on the altar when you make expiation for it, and consecrate it by anointing. For seven days <sup>37</sup> you shall make expiation for the altar, and consecrate it, and it shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall be forfeit as sacred.

This is what you shall offer on the altar: two yearling <sup>38</sup> rams regularly every day. You shall offer the one ram at <sup>39</sup> dawn, and the second between dusk and dark, a tenth of <sup>40</sup> an ephah of flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of pure oil of pounded olives, and a drink-offering of a quarter of a hin of wine for the first ram. You shall offer the second <sup>41</sup> ram between dusk and dark, and with it the same grain-offering and drink-offering as at dawn, for a soothing odour: it is a food-offering to the LORD, a regular whole- <sup>42</sup> offering in every generation; you shall make the offering at the entrance to the Tent of the Presence before the LORD, where I meet you and speak to you. I shall meet the <sup>43</sup> Israelites there, and the place will be hallowed by my glory. I shall hallow the Tent of the Presence and the <sup>44</sup> altar; and Aaron and his sons I shall consecrate to serve me as priests. I shall dwell in the midst of the Israelites, <sup>45</sup> I shall become their God, and by my dwelling among <sup>46</sup> them they will know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD their God.

\* After chapters 25-8 have set out the instructions for the arrangement of Israel's sanctuary and its priests, we are now given a detailed account of the ceremonies by which the priests were to be installed into their office. These have a two-fold purpose: first to cleanse the priests from every vestige of sin, since they were to be in closest contact with the holy God,



and secondly to set up a bond of holiness between them and the altar which they were to serve. The actual carrying out of these ceremonies of installation is not described until Lev. 8: 1-9: 24, after the instructions for the various types of sacrifice involved have been given in Lev. 1-7.

29: 7. *Take the anointing oil*: for the significance of anointing, see on 30: 22 ff.

9. *by a rule binding for all time*: here the permanency of the exclusive privilege of Aaron's family to serve as Israel's priests is firmly laid down. In contrast we learn of many priests drawn from other families in the early period (cp. especially Judg. 17-18), and the restriction to Aaron's family is a post-exilic development. It was a not unnatural sequel to the restriction of all sacrificial worship to Jerusalem, which took place in Josiah's reign (2 Kings 23: 4 ff.). The purpose of such a restrictive ruling was to prevent irregularities of worship, and to ensure that the sacrificial ceremonies were faithfully carried out according to the prescribed instructions by trained personnel.

10. *and they shall lay their hands on its head*: the placing of the hands on the head of the animal destined to be sacrificed was a way of identifying it with the worshipper on whose behalf it was offered. In some way the sins of the offerer were thought to be transferred to his sacrificial gift, which was then handed over to God. Cp. also verses 15, 19.

11. *Slaughter the bull*: the ritual of sacrifice carried out is that of the sin-offering, the instructions for which are given in Lev. 4: 1-6: 7. Such a sin-offering effected a cleansing from the 'stain' of sin. In this case no specific prior sin committed by Aaron or his sons is indicated, but the rite is necessary to remove all the sin that was believed to have been inevitably incurred. Similarly, a sin-offering had to be offered annually on behalf of the priests (Lev. 16: 6-14), as a general rite of cleansing for sins accidentally incurred.

14. *but the flesh of the bull*: cp. Lev. 4: 11-12. The rule for the disposal of the carcase of the sin-offering varied at different

times. At one period it was allowed to be eaten by the priests (Lev. 6: 24-30; cp. Lev. 10: 16-20), but a stricter ruling was introduced which demanded that it be burnt at a special place outside the camp, as is required here. The sin-offering was regarded as especially holy because it secured atonement for priests. No doubt also it was thought to be in some way affected by the sins that it removed, so that it required to be carefully protected against further contact with the profane world. Thus it had to be disposed of *outside the camp* where there was no danger of further contact with people.

15. *Take one of the rams*: cp. Lev. 1: 3-17 for the rite of the whole-offering. This was a most solemn form of sacrifice in which the carcase of the entire beast was burnt on the altar to God. There is no clear indication as to how it differed from other sacrifices in the atonement that it secured, although it is reasonable to suppose that it was regarded as especially effective. The various types of sacrifice are not wholly distinct from each other in purpose.

18. *it is a soothing odour*: the phrase *soothing odour* represents a very ancient description of sacrifice as a 'savoury smell', which was thought to be particularly pleasing to God, as it was to men. In the context here it is clearly a very archaic expression which has been retained although it no longer expresses the author's true conception of the spiritual purpose of sacrifice.

*a food-offering*: R.S.V., 'an offering by fire'. The precise etymology and meaning of several of the terms used for sacrifice are obscure. In this case earlier translators assumed a connection with fire, because of a close similarity with the Hebrew word for 'fire'. It appears more probable, however, that the word originated from the idea of providing food for the deity.

20. *put it on the lobes of the right ears*: the smearing of the blood on the extremities of the body signified the cleansing of the whole body. As part of the blood was flung against the altar and part was used for this particular act, so it was believed



to set up a particular bond of holiness between the priests and the altar. A similar reasoning underlies the action in which some of the anointing oil was sprinkled on the priests and their vestments.

23. *Take also one round loaf of bread*: the original character of sacrifice as a meal offered to the deity and consisting of animal flesh, together with bread and a kind of pancake, is shown here. This practice is a legacy from a remote past custom, and it is evident that the author here thought of God in spiritual terms, which precluded the belief that he needed a meal.

26. *present it as a special gift*: the Hebrew word used indicates that this special gift, assigned to be eaten by Aaron and his sons, was ceremonially waved towards the altar (Lev. 7: 34-6). It was that part of a sacrifice which would normally have been assigned to the officiating priest as his due.

27. *Hallow the breast*: before they could be eaten, the parts of the sacrifice assigned to the priests were consecrated by being waved towards the altar. Thereby they were symbolically given to God, and then handed over to his priests.

29. *Aaron's sacred vestments*: these were only to be worn during the installation ceremonies themselves, since they were affected by the holiness of the altar. They were afterwards then only to be worn when future priests were installed, but cp. Lev. 16: 4, 23-4, which indicates their use annually at a special atonement service.

33. *No unqualified person may eat them*: i.e., no person who did not belong to one of the priestly families descended from Aaron. Only those who were themselves holy could eat such holy food. The limits to which such holiness extended in a family are defined in Lev. 22: 10-16.

37. *Whatever touches the altar*: if, during the ceremonies, anything or any animal should inadvertently touch the altar, it would have to be destroyed because it had become affected by the holiness of the altar.

40. *a tenth of an ephah*: the ephah was a dry measure,

of comparable volume to the bath liquid measure and containing approximately 40 litres.

*a quarter of a hin:* the hin was a dry measure which was also used for liquids. It contained one sixth of an ephah, and measured approximately 6.5 litres.

45. *I shall dwell in the midst:* the whole purpose of Israel's sacrificial worship is thereby summed up. God would be with his people by means of the glory which was to remain in the sanctuary. This divine presence was to be a source of life and blessing for the whole nation, and from it the priest would be able to obtain further divine instructions. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE INCENSE ALTAR

Make an altar on which to burn incense; make it of acacia- 30  
wood. It shall be square, a cubit long by a cubit broad and 2  
two cubits high; the horns of one piece with it. Overlay 3  
it with pure gold, the top, the sides all round, and the  
horns; and put round it a band of gold. Make pairs of 4  
gold rings for it; put them under the band at the two  
corners on both sides to receive the poles by which it is  
to be carried. Make the poles of acacia-wood and overlay 5  
them with gold. Put it before the Veil in front of the Ark 6  
of the Tokens<sup>a</sup> where I will meet you. On it Aaron shall 7  
burn fragrant incense; every morning when he tends the  
lamps he shall burn the incense, and when he mounts the 8  
lamps between dusk and dark, he shall burn the incense;  
so there shall be a regular burning of incense before the  
LORD for all time. You shall not offer on it any un- 9  
authorized incense, nor any whole-offering or grain-  
offering; and you shall not pour a drink-offering over it.  
Aaron shall make expiation with blood on its horns once 10

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. adds before the cover over the Tokens.*



a year; with blood from the sin-offering of the yearly Expiation<sup>a</sup> he shall do this for all time. It is most holy to the LORD.

\* We now begin a series of instructions for four subsidiary features of Israel's worship, beginning with an incense altar. These have no doubt been added to the original set of instructions for the Tabernacle and its service in order to provide a reasonably complete list of the institutions of worship. Solomon's temple contained a golden incense altar (1 Kings 7: 48), and one also stood in the rebuilt Jerusalem temple in the much later Maccabean age (1 Macc. 1: 21). At what time Israel actually introduced such altars is unknown, although in the earliest period incense would have been burnt in a pan, without requiring a special altar. The instructions for such a lavish one as described here, made of acacia-wood and overlaid with gold, have certainly been influenced by the tradition of the Solomonic temple.

Although the burning of incense was a very ancient ritual action, the sweet-smelling smoke being thought to drive out evil from the sanctuary, it came to have a special significance in Israel. Cp. Lev. 16: 3, 13, where the cloud of incense smoke is symbolic of the cloud of the LORD's glory. In later Judaism incense smoke was regarded as a symbol of the prayers of the saints (cp. Rev. 5: 8).

30: 2. *the horns of one piece with it*: the horns were superfluous on an altar for burning incense, but have been introduced in imitation of the much larger altar of whole-offering.

4. *Make pairs of gold rings for it*: like all the other items of sanctuary furniture the incense altar was designed to be portable.

6. *the Ark of the Tokens*: see on 25: 16.

9. *any unauthorized incense*: this special warning comes

[a] Or Atonement.

rather strangely here, but was apparently necessary because the burning of incense held a prominent place in many old Canaanite practices. The specific character of the unauthorized incense is not stated, but it is noteworthy that a similar adjective is used to describe the 'illicit fire' offered by Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10: 1-3), which resulted in their death. It is further stated that no other form of offering is to be made on the altar save that of incense.

10. *Aaron shall make expiation*: just as the priestly servants of the sanctuary are assumed to incur sin in the process of fulfilling their duties throughout the year, so even the Tabernacle furnishings are regarded as becoming tainted with sin. That such impersonal objects could be regarded as in need of expiation, for the removal of sin, reveals the quasi-physical way in which sin was regarded by the author. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR A TEMPLE TAX

The LORD spoke to Moses and said: When you number <sup>11,12</sup> the Israelites for the purpose of registration, each man shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD,<sup>a</sup> to avert plague among them during the registration. As each man <sup>13</sup> crosses over to those already counted he shall give half a shekel by the sacred standard (twenty gerahs to the shekel) as a contribution to the LORD. Everyone from <sup>14</sup> twenty years old and upwards who has crossed over to those already counted shall give a contribution to the LORD. The rich man shall give no more than the half- <sup>15</sup> shekel, and the poor man shall give no less, when you give the contribution to the LORD to make expiation for your lives. The money received from the Israelites for <sup>16</sup> expiation you shall apply to the service of the Tent of the

[a] *So Sept.; Heb. adds* because of the registration.



Presence. The expiation for your lives shall be a reminder of the Israelites to the LORD.

\* This short section lays down the imposition of a poll-tax for each adult male member of the community, by means of which each such person was to ransom his life from God. The occasion for this tax is a census, or registration of the people, which is not in fact carried out until Num. 1. Such a registration was regarded as a dangerous time since men were thought to be usurping God's authority by seeking such comprehensive knowledge. Hence the occasion was regarded as fraught with the risk of plague (cp. verse 12 and see 2 Sam. 24 for the occurrence of a plague at such a time). Although the present instructions envisage only a single, once and for all, payment of the tax, which was to be used for the upkeep of the service of the Tent of the Presence (verse 16), it is most likely that this account was used to justify the regular imposition of such a tax in post-exilic Israel. The existence of such a regular sanctuary tax, as a contribution towards the cost of worship, was no doubt very much older in Israel, and follows a widely practised feature of life in the ancient world. Its practice in New Testament times is shown from Matt. 17: 24-7.

12. *When you number the Israelites*: the holding of a census was normally an action of the political authority in the ancient world, but in Israel, where the religious and political authorities were particularly closely related, a specific sanctuary registration was quite appropriate. Its purpose would certainly have been primarily for the collection of a tax.

*a ransom for his life*: the ransom price was originally that required to set a man free from slavery (Exod. 21: 30). Here it is regarded as a payment to avert the danger of plague in the time of the census registration. In fact the census of Num. 1 is then commanded by God himself.

13. *half a shekel by the sacred standard*: the sanctuary, or sacred, shekel was slightly lighter than the standard one, and thus of less value. The standard shekel did not remain a con-

sistent weight throughout the Old Testament, but averaged approximately 11.6 grammes, and the sacred shekel about 9.7 grammes. The reckoning of two standards of shekel weight appears only to have been introduced after the exile.

14. *from twenty years old and upwards*: cp. Num. 1: 3; 14: 29. In the post-exilic period the age of twenty came to be regarded as an age of majority, from which time men were reckoned as legally responsible members of the community.

15. *The rich man shall give no more*: since the benefits of worship are regarded as equally available to all, it is felt to be right that everyone should pay the same amount of one half-shekel.

16. *The expiation for your lives*: this sanctuary tax was also to act on behalf of the Israelites as a reminder to the LORD so that he would not forget to look favourably upon them. \*

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR A BRONZE BASIN

The LORD spoke to Moses and said: Make a bronze basin 17, 18 for ablution with its stand of bronze; put it between the Tent of the Presence and the altar, and fill it with water with 19 which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet. When they enter the Tent of the Presence they shall wash 20 with water, lest they die. So also when they approach the altar to minister, to burn a food-offering to the LORD, they shall wash their hands and feet, lest they die. It shall 21 be a rule for all time binding on him and his descendants in every generation.

\* The ceremonies of worship required very careful attention on the part of the priests to regular washing both before and after the performance of their duties. A laver, or wash-basin, was therefore an essential part of the sanctuary furnishings. The physical cleanliness obtained by washing was an aspect



of the holiness required of the priest in fulfilling his duties. Neglect of this was regarded as so serious an offence that it could lead to the death of the offender (verse 20). \*

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ANOINTING OIL

22, 23 The LORD spoke to Moses and said: You yourself shall take spices as follows: five hundred shekels of sticks of myrrh, half that amount (two hundred and fifty shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels of  
24 aromatic cane, five hundred shekels of cassia by the sacred  
25 standard, and a hin of olive oil. From these prepare sacred anointing oil, a perfume compounded by the perfumer's  
26 art. This shall be the sacred anointing oil. Anoint with it  
27 the Tent of the Presence and the Ark of the Tokens, the table and all its vessels, the lamp-stand and its fittings, the  
28 altar of incense, the altar of whole-offering and all its  
29 vessels, the basin and its stand. You shall consecrate them, and they shall be most holy; whatever touches them shall  
30 be forfeit as sacred. Anoint Aaron and his sons, and conse-  
31 crate them to be my priests. Speak to the Israelites and say: This shall be the holy anointing oil for my service in  
32 every generation. It shall not be used for anointing the human body, and you must not prepare any oil like it after the same prescription. It is holy, and you shall treat it as  
33 holy. The man who compounds perfume like it, or who puts any of it on any unqualified person, shall be cut off from his father's kin.

\* We have already been told that the high-priest was to be anointed (29: 7), and we are now given the instructions for making the anointing oil, which was to be used not only for

the anointing of the priests, but also for the sanctuary and its furnishings. Such anointing provided a visible expression of the extension of the divine holiness to all the objects and persons affected. It was therefore essential that such holy anointing oil should be protected against any misuse, or application to an unqualified person (verse 33).

The anointing of a sacred rock at Bethel is mentioned in Gen. 28: 18; 31: 13, and the anointing of sacred persons was no doubt a very ancient practice which is best known in connection with the kingship (1 Sam. 10: 1; 16: 13; 1 Kings 1: 39). The later expectation of a 'Messiah' or 'Anointed One' was primarily associated with a coming king, although it could be linked with the priesthood. Some Jews therefore came to expect two messiahs – a priestly one and a kingly one. The widespread extension of the rite to cover all the priests and sanctuary furnishings as is described here represents a late development of the practice.

23. *You yourself shall take spices*: the recipe given for the anointing oil is likely to be very old in accordance with the generally conservative trend in such ceremonial matters of religion.

24. *cassia*: this was an aromatic gum obtained from the bark of a particular species of tree.

29. *whatever touches them*: in the case of animals and physical objects being *forfeit as sacred* meant being destroyed. In the case of persons, the man or woman concerned would be barred from returning to normal life until he, or she, had fulfilled certain precautionary cleansing procedures to 'remove' the holiness acquired.

32. *It shall not be used*: alongside the practice of solemn anointing there was also a more widespread cosmetic and hygienic use of oil, rubbed on to the human body (cp. Ps. 23: 5; 104: 15). It was important to prohibit the use of the holy anointing oil for this purpose, and also to insist that oil used for such secular purposes should not be made from the same prescription as the oil of the sanctuary. \*



## INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING INCENSE

- 34 The LORD said to Moses, Take fragrant spices: gum resin,<sup>a</sup>  
 aromatic shell, galbanum; add pure frankincense to the  
 35 spices in equal proportions. Make it into incense, perfume  
 made by the perfumer's craft, salted and pure, a holy  
 36 thing. Pound some of it into fine powder, and put it in  
 front of the Tokens in the Tent of the Presence, where  
 37 I shall meet you; you shall treat it as most holy. The in-  
 cense prepared according to this prescription you shall  
 not make for your own use. You shall treat it as holy to the  
 38 LORD. The man who makes any like it for his own pleasure  
 shall be cut off from his father's kin.

\* Following the prescription for the making of the anointing oil we have a similar instruction for making the holy incense which was to be burnt on the incense altar in the Tabernacle. Once again special precautions are included to prevent any similar incense being used for a profane, or purely private, purpose.

34. *galbanum*: this was an aromatic herb of the fennel family. \*

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF  
CRAFTSMEN

- 31 <sup>1,2</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and said, Mark this: I have specially chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the  
 3 tribe of Judah. I have filled him with divine spirit, making  
 4 him skilful and ingenious, expert in every craft, and a  
 5 master of design, whether in gold, silver, copper, or  
 cutting stones to be set, or carving wood, for workman-

[a] Or mastic.

ship of every kind. Further, I have appointed Aholiab<sup>a</sup> 6 son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan to help him, and I have endowed every skilled craftsman with the skill which he has. They shall make everything that I have commanded you: the Tent of the Presence, the Ark 7 for the Tokens, the cover over it, and all the furnishings of the tent; the table and its vessels, the pure lamp-stand 8 and all its fittings, the altar of incense, the altar of 9 whole-offering and all its vessels, the basin and its stand; the stitched vestments, that is the sacred vestments for 10 Aaron the priest and the vestments for his sons when they minister as priests, the anointing oil and the fragrant 11 incense for the Holy Place. They shall carry out all I have commanded you.

\* For the making of the sanctuary God himself designates the two skilled craftsmen, Bezalel and Aholiab, who are to undertake the work. Undoubtedly these two figures would have represented famous family guilds of craftsmen who were well known in ancient Israel, although no further information about them has been preserved, other than their tribal associations. We should probably think of families who were expert in wood and metalcraft, and who were employed in the making and furnishing of the temple at some stage.

31: 2. *Bezalel son of Uri*: for the names cp. Ezra 10: 24, 30, which perhaps suggests that the names belong to the post-exilic period.

6. *Aholiab*: the name is not otherwise found in the Old Testament. \*

[a] Or Oholiab.



## A REMINDER REGARDING THE SABBATH

- 12, 13 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, Speak to the Israelites, you yourself, and say to them: Above all you shall observe my sabbaths, for the sabbath is a sign between me and you in every generation that you may know that I am
- 14 the LORD who hallows you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is a holy day for you. If anyone profanes it he must be put to death. Anyone who does work on it shall
- 15 be cut off from his father's kin. Work may be done on six days, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of sacred rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does work on the
- 16 sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites shall keep the sabbath, they shall keep it in every generation as a
- 17 covenant for ever. It is a sign for ever between me and the Israelites, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he ceased work and refreshed himself.
- 18 When he had finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, the LORD gave him the two tablets of the Tokens, tablets of stone written with the finger of God.

\* The conclusion of the instructions for making the Tabernacle and its furnishings provides the occasion for a further reminder about the sabbath. Although this was a very early religious institution in Israel, it came to assume a very great importance after the exile as a mark of the particular holiness of Israel and the unique character of its worship. Thus although the P author had already affirmed the unique significance of the sabbath (16: 22-7), besides the inclusion of a law commanding its observance (20: 8-11), he now reiterates its importance. The sabbath was not simply a rest day for the general welfare of the people, but a sign between God and

Israel (verse 13) that a special relationship existed between them. Any infringement of the sabbath rest was to be punished by death (verses 14, 15).

13. *Above all you shall observe*: that the sabbath stood above other religious obligations in importance was a feature of Israelite religion as it emerged after the exile. Although the institution was very much earlier in origin, it was not at first given such prominence as a distinctive badge of faith.

14. *If anyone profanes it*: cp. Num. 15: 32-6 for an example of a person profaning the sabbath by gathering sticks.

18. *When he had finished speaking*: this is a brief editorial note that marks the conclusion of the instructions for the Tabernacle, and prepares for the unhappy sequel in Israel's apostasy over the golden calf. The reference to the two tablets of the Tokens recalls the mention of them in 24: 12-15. For their being inscribed by God cp. 32: 15-16; Deut. 9: 10. Exod. 34: 1 adds that the two tablets were cut out of the rock by Moses. \*

#### THE SIN OVER THE GOLDEN CALF

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming **32**  
down from the mountain, they confronted Aaron and  
said to him, 'Come, make us gods to go ahead of us. As  
for this fellow Moses, who brought us up from Egypt,  
we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron <sub>2</sub>  
answered them, 'Strip the gold rings from the ears of your  
wives<sup>a</sup> and daughters, and bring them to me.' So all the <sub>3</sub>  
people stripped themselves of their gold earrings and  
brought them to Aaron. He took them out of their hands, <sub>4</sub>  
cast the metal in a mould, and made it into the image of  
a bull-calf. 'These', he<sup>b</sup> said, 'are your gods, O Israel,  
that brought you up from Egypt.' Then Aaron was afraid <sub>5</sub>

[a] So Sept.; Heb. adds and sons.

[b] So Sept.; Heb. they.



- and built an altar in front of it and issued this proclamation, 'Tomorrow there is to be a pilgrim-feast to the  
6 LORD.' Next day the people rose early, offered whole-offerings, and brought shared-offerings. After this they sat down to eat and drink and then gave themselves up to  
7 revelry. But the LORD said to Moses, 'Go down at once, for your people, the people you brought up from Egypt,  
8 have done a disgraceful thing; so quickly have they turned aside from the way I commanded them. They have made themselves an image of a bull-calf, they have prostrated themselves before it, sacrificed to it and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from Egypt."  
9 So the LORD said to Moses, 'I have considered this people,  
10 and I see that they are a stubborn people. Now, let me alone to vent my anger upon them, so that I may put an end to them and make a great nation spring from you.'  
11 But Moses set himself to placate the LORD his God: 'O LORD,' he said, 'why shouldst thou vent thy anger upon thy people, whom thou didst bring out of Egypt with  
12 great power and a strong hand? Why let the Egyptians say, "So he meant evil when he took them out, to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the earth"? Turn from thy anger, and think better of the  
13 evil thou dost intend against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thy own self: "I will make your posterity countless as the stars in the sky, and all this land, of which I have spoken, I will give to them, and they shall possess  
14 it for ever."' So the LORD relented, and spared his people the evil with which he had threatened them.  
15 Moses turned and went down the mountain with the

two tablets of the Tokens in his hands, inscribed on both sides; on the front and on the back they were inscribed. The tablets were the handiwork of God, and the writing <sup>16</sup> was God's writing, engraved on the tablets. Joshua, hear- <sup>17</sup> ing the uproar the people were making, said to Moses, 'Listen! There is fighting in the camp.' Moses replied, <sup>18</sup>

'This is not the clamour of warriors,  
nor the clamour of a defeated people;  
it is the sound of singing that I hear.'

As he approached the camp, Moses saw the bull-calf and <sup>19</sup> the dancing, and he was angry; he flung the tablets down, and they were shattered to pieces at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf they had made and burnt <sup>20</sup> it; he ground it to powder, sprinkled it on water, and made the Israelites drink it. He demanded of Aaron, <sup>21</sup> 'What did this people do to you that you should have brought such great guilt upon them?' Aaron replied, 'Do <sup>22</sup> not be angry, sir. The people were deeply troubled; that you well know. And they said to me, "Make us gods to <sup>23</sup> go ahead of us, because, as for this fellow Moses, who brought us up from Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So I said to them, "Those of you who <sup>24</sup> have any gold, strip it off." They gave it me, I threw it in the fire, and out came this bull-calf.' Moses saw that the <sup>25</sup> people were out of control and that Aaron had laid them open to the secret malice of their enemies. He took his <sup>26</sup> place at the gate of the camp and said, 'Who is on the LORD's side? Come here to me'; and the Levites all rallied to him. He said to them, 'These are the words of <sup>27</sup> the LORD the God of Israel: "Arm yourselves, each of



you, with his sword. Go through the camp from gate to gate and back again. Each of you kill his brother, his  
 28 friend, his neighbour.”” The Levites obeyed, and about  
 29 three thousand of the people died that day. Moses then said, ‘Today you have consecrated yourselves to the LORD completely,<sup>a</sup> because you have turned each against his own son and his own brother and so have this day brought a blessing upon yourselves.’

30 The next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. I shall now go up to the LORD; perhaps  
 31 I may be able to secure pardon for your sin.’ So Moses returned to the LORD and said, ‘O hear me! This people has committed a great sin: they have made themselves  
 32 gods of gold. If thou wilt forgive them, forgive. But if not, blot out my name, I pray, from thy book which thou  
 33 hast written.’ The LORD answered Moses, ‘It is the man who has sinned against me that I will blot out from my  
 34 book. But go now, lead the people to the place which I have told you of. My angel shall go ahead of you, but a day will come when I shall punish them for their sin.’  
 35 And the LORD smote the people for worshipping the bull-calf which Aaron had made.

\* In chapters 26–31 we have been given a detailed set of instructions for Israel’s worship, which was to be a unique form of communion between the LORD and Israel in accordance with the revelation on Sinai. We have noted that these instructions were only composed late in Israel’s history, and have initially been introduced here by the post-exilic P author. Much that is contained in them is therefore late, and is in part an ideal reconstruction of what Israel’s worship should

[a] *So Sept.; Heb.* Consecrate yourselves to the LORD today.

have been, in the opinion of the author. Nevertheless, they are based on recollections of actual institutions of worship which existed in Israel, especially in the Jerusalem temple. Reinterpretation of earlier ritual became necessary when situations changed and ideas developed. Israel was also fully aware, however, that much that had passed for worship in its history had not been in accord with the instructions given at Sinai, but had been of an alien, pagan character. What we have in chapter 32 is a reflection on this pagan, apostate element in Israel's worship. The incident of the golden calf provides an example and a warning lesson against a type of worship which was to recur in Israel not once, but many times, and to become a major reason for believing that the Sinai covenant had been broken by Israel. Thus although we are presented here with a narrative sequel to the law-giving on Sinai, its intention is to show the spiritual sequel of Israel's disloyal attitude to God, its distrust of Moses, and its readiness to resort back to a type of religion which we know to have been prevalent among the Canaanites. The prophet Ezekiel summarizes the situation vividly: 'But they rebelled against me, they refused to listen to me, and not one of them cast away the loathsome things on which he feasted his eyes or forsook the idols of Egypt' (Ezek. 20: 8).

Chapter 32 belongs with chapters 33-4 as a series of narratives which are all concerned with the situation facing Israel immediately the Sinai laws and instructions have been received. Their connecting theme is that of the two tablets of law, first introduced in 24: 12-14, but they are also all related in different ways to the question of the nature of Israel's worship as a response to God's revelation on Sinai. The question of the sources from which the narratives have been taken has been much discussed. Most scholars recognize parts of J and E to be present, but are often reluctant to define the divisions very sharply. Others, with some justification, regard the whole sequence of chapters 32-4 as deriving from a source quite distinct from the other main sources used in Exodus. In



any case most of the material is early, certainly much earlier than P, and at least a basis of it seems to come from J. To this a great many additions have been made, often in the form of separate narrative incidents which can be related to the main theme.

32: 1. *When the people saw*: Moses is entirely exonerated from any complicity in the resort to paganism which Israel now makes. The initiative comes from the people, but Aaron lends himself to become a willing and active accomplice. The delay in Moses' return to the people provides a further occasion for the people to express distrust of him.

2. *Strip the gold rings*: cp. 33: 6. Only in this fashion could an adequate supply of gold, so necessary if a worthy image of God was to be made, be regarded as available in the desert. Furthermore, such popular participation indicated an involvement of the whole people in this act of idolatry.

4. *the image of a bull-calf*: the bull was a popular religious symbol in Canaanite religion because of its associations with strength and fertility. In Canaanite mythology the two chief gods, El and Baal, were both closely associated with the bull as a divine symbol. The god was not thought actually to have the appearance of a bull, since he was regarded as having a human form, but he was believed either to stand on the bull as a kind of support, or simply to use it as a symbol of his strength. That it is a bull-calf is a rather derogatory allusion to the size of the image, which was much less than life size.

'*These*', he said, '*are your gods*': the plural 'gods' is out of place here since only one image has been made, but is to be explained from the words used by Jeroboam to introduce his two bull-calf images at Bethel and Dan in 1 Kings 12: 28-9. There can be no doubt that although the author has based his narrative on the situation at Sinai he is here looking forward to the pagan bull images set up by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan. Under the guise of condemning Aaron's apostasy at Sinai he subtly denounces the worship of Bethel and Dan, which was

certainly still being actively pursued in his own day. Cp. the denunciations of Hosea: Hos. 8: 5; 10: 5; 13: 2.

5. *Then Aaron was afraid*: i.e. he was filled with a religious awe of the image he had produced. The reading is based on the Syriac text, since the Hebrew has simply 'and he saw'. From being a reluctant helper Aaron was drawn in to become the leading worshipper of the new god, building an altar for it and establishing a festival in its honour.

6. *and then gave themselves up to revelry*: the reference is particularly to an orgy which included sexual immorality (cp. Num. 25: 1-18), with which the sacred symbol of the bull was closely associated in pagan practice.

10. *so that I may put an end to them*: by its false worship Israel had broken both the first and second commandments (Exod. 20: 3-6), and had thereby broken the Sinai covenant. God now proposes to destroy them as a punishment, and to start to create a new nation from Moses.

11. *But Moses set himself to placate the LORD*: the greatest sign of Moses' spiritual stature is his willingness to intercede on behalf of Israel (cp. Num. 14: 13-19; Deut. 9: 25-9). A primary task of both priest and prophet in Israel was to offer prayers on behalf of their people, especially prayers seeking forgiveness. Moses' greatness appears in that his prayers were successful.

12. *Why let the Egyptians say...?*: the foremost reason why God should not destroy Israel is that the Egyptians (and so all gentile peoples) would not recognize the LORD as the true God if he did so. In this way God's name would be profaned, as Ezekiel describes in a similar situation (Ezek. 36: 20).

13. *Remember Abraham*: the reference is specifically to God's promise in Gen. 12: 1-3 promising greatness to Abraham's descendants, which would not be fulfilled if he destroyed Israel.

15. *inscribed on both sides*: inscribed tablets normally had writing only on one side, so that these are shown to be very exceptional, both by their unusual form and by their divinely given contents.



17. *Joshua, hearing the uproar*: Joshua appears in 24: 13 *a* as the companion of Moses, and in Deut. 31: 7-8, 14-29 is appointed as his successor. His failure to understand what is going on here indicates that he, like Moses, was not a participant in the idolatrous revelry.

19. *he flung the tablets down*: see 34: 1 ff. for the replacement of the broken tablets by two new ones. The action gives visible expression to the fact that Israel has broken the covenant by its worship of the golden calf, and thus the covenant itself is nullified. Only by the grace of God are new tablets made, which in effect renew the covenant. Israel has come as near as it can to self-destruction at its very birthplace. Only God's forgiving patience, appealed to by the prayers of Moses, enables it to continue to become the recipient of the earlier promises to Abraham and to Moses.

20. *he took the calf*: since the image of the calf was cast from gold it would not burn. Either we must think of a wooden pedestal, or of a wooden core which was plated over with gold. *and made the Israelites drink it*: cp. Num. 5: 16-22 for a trial ritual in which 'water of cursing' was used. Moses here mixes the powdered gold with the water, in the expectation that those who drink it will suffer harmful effects if they are guilty. Punishment then occurs in the form of a mysterious illness which is referred to in verse 35.

21. *He demanded of Aaron*: Aaron here takes the full blame for the people's idolatry, although he half excuses himself by referring to the miraculous origin of the bull-calf image. Only here does Aaron appear in such an unfavourable light in the Old Testament. Since the family of Aaron were given the exclusive privilege of ministering as Israel's priests, their ancestor's sin appears to be all the more inexplicable.

26. *Who is on the LORD's side?*: out of the occasion of Israel's idolatry there comes a demonstration of exceptional and fervent loyalty on the part of the Levites. The Levites appear originally as a secular tribe (cp. Gen. 34) who later received the exclusive right of ministering as Israel's priests

(esp. Deut. 33: 8-11), and who eventually became an order of inferior temple servants who were not allowed to perform the priestly rite of offering sacrifice at Israel's sanctuary (cp. Ezek. 44: 10-13). Here their priestly disregard for normal family ties and obligations is demonstrated by their willingness to inflict God's punishment on their own kin. It is not at all clear why 3,000 Israelites died, and what proportion of those involved they represented.

29. *Today you have consecrated yourselves*: the attainment of blessing by the Levites, as a result of their un pitying violence, was commended for the degree of loyalty to God which it displayed, by their removal of the pollution of sin from the people. It hardly needs to be said that such wholesale killing, in whatever cause, is wholly repugnant to the modern religious mind. The *blessing* was understood by the author to consist in the special right of serving as priests, which the Levites of his day had come to enjoy (Deut. 33: 8-11; cp. Judg. 17: 7-13). Thus he has identified the requirement that a priest should give up his normal family ties (Deut. 33: 9) to serve the sanctuary, with a willingness to punish even members of one's own family when this is thought to be God's will.

32. *blot out my name*: Moses' prayer pictures the names of all living people as recorded by God in a book. When they die their name is erased, so that the blotting-out of a name signifies death.

33. *the man who has sinned against me*: God will only punish those who are actual culprits, and not hold the entire nation guilty. This connects with the reference to 3,000 in verse 28, although we are not shown how the guilty ones are identified.

34. *My angel shall go ahead of you*: cp. 23: 20-3; 33: 2.

*but a day will come*: God's judgement is held in suspense. Cp. Ezek. 20: 9, 17, 22. The author expected that one day Israel would suffer a fearful judgement which would effect a punishment for all the past sins by which it had broken God's covenant.



35. *the LORD smote the people*: i.e. with a plague or sickness of some kind. In spite of Moses' prayer, and the suspension of God's punishment, the people did not get off scot free. So also verses 29, 33. We are clearly faced here with different interpretations and traditions about God's punishment of Israel, which have all been linked with the 'classic' sin of idolatry. \*

#### GOD'S PRESENCE WITH ISRAEL

After Israel had encountered the LORD on Mount Sinai, and he had appeared to the people in a theophany, the departure from the holy mountain assumed the character of a departure from God. How could Israel be assured that God would be present with his people in the future, as he had been on Sinai? Chapter 33 contains four separate, but related, narratives concerned with the promise of God's presence.

The question of how God was to be present with Israel in the new land to which they were going was certainly a very real one for the new nation. We have already noted the belief that the LORD was especially the God of Sinai, and Elijah's pilgrimage to the holy mountain (called Horeb in agreement with the E tradition) indicates that even in his day God was still believed to be present there in a special way (1 Kings 19: 4-18). Thus the fact that Israel was to dwell in a land far distant from Sinai, the home of the LORD, required a clearer understanding of how God's presence was to accompany Israel. The four sections of the present chapter are (1) verses 1-6: Israel's expression of mourning; (2) verses 7-11: the Tent of the Presence; (3) verses 12-17: God's presence in person; (4) verses 18-23: Moses' vision of God's glory.

#### ISRAEL'S EXPRESSION OF MOURNING

- 33 The LORD spoke to Moses: 'Come, go up from here, you and the people you have brought up from Egypt, to the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that

I would give to their posterity. I will send an angel ahead <sup>2</sup> of you, and will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. I will bring you<sup>a</sup> to a land flowing with milk <sup>3</sup> and honey, but I will not journey in your company, for fear that I annihilate you on the way; for you are a stubborn people.' When the people heard this harsh sen- <sup>4</sup> tence they went about like mourners, and no man put on his ornaments. The LORD said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites, <sup>5</sup> "You are a stubborn people: at any moment, if I journey in your company, I may annihilate you. Put away your ornaments now, and I will determine what to do to you."' And so the Israelites stripped off their ornaments, and <sup>6</sup> wore them no more from Mount Horeb onwards.

\* This narrative centres upon one single incident: Israel's stripping off of all personal ornaments as a sign of mourning, which appropriately links the story of the idolatry over the golden calf with the promise of God's presence without which Israel's worship could not be complete. Whereas in 32: 24 the Israelites had removed their gold jewellery in order to make an image, they remove their ornaments here simply as a sign of mourning. Many of the nation had died on account of their idolatry, and the nation as a whole had broken its covenant obligation. We should also remember that ornaments often took the form of amulets, designed to ward off evil spirits, and so could possess a decidedly pagan character. This section uses phrases which recur frequently later in Deuteronomy, and it is important here as a bridge between the threat which ends chapter 32 and the promise of God's accompanying presence which is found in 33: 7 ff.

33: 2. *I will send an angel*: see above, p. 155, on 23: 20 ff., and for *the Canaanites*: see above, p. 21, on 3: 8.

[a] I will bring you: *so Sept.; Heb. om.*



3. *I will not journey in your company*: by its sin over the gold bull-calf Israel had forfeited the supreme privilege of having God's presence in its midst. However, after Israel had expressed its grief at this news, verses 12-17 affirm God's promise to go with Israel in person.

5. *I may annihilate you*: Israel had demonstrated its sinful temperament, so that too close a contact with the holiness of God would only endanger Israel's own safety.

6. *and wore them no more*: the narrative is intended to explain a continuing custom in Israelite life. \*

#### THE TENT OF THE PRESENCE

7 Moses used to take a<sup>a</sup> tent and pitch it at a distance outside the camp. He called it the Tent of the Presence, and everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the  
8 Tent of the Presence outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance to his tent, and follow Moses with  
9 their eyes until he entered the tent. When Moses entered it, the pillar of cloud came down, and stayed at the en-  
10 trance to the tent while the LORD spoke with Moses. As soon as the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they would all prostrate themselves,  
11 every man at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak with Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, never moved from inside the tent.

\* Although the Tent of the Presence has already been referred to in the guise of the instructions for the Tabernacle given by

[a] Or the.

P (Exod. 26 ff., esp. 27: 21), what we have here is a very much earlier account of the Tent of the Presence drawn from E (or perhaps J). It points to a tent of a very simple, unadorned, kind pitched outside the camp (unlike the Tabernacle which was in the centre; cp. 25: 8), and in which oracles were received (33: 9, 11). This Tent of the Presence was certainly a very ancient institution in Israel, serving as a special sanctuary before the Jerusalem temple was built. The Tabernacle which P describes is in fact an ideal reconstruction based upon this early tent, but remodelled in the light of what the Jerusalem temple had become.

7. *everyone who sought the LORD*: i.e. everyone who had a problem requiring an oracular decision from God. From this, and from verses 9 and 11, it is clear that the primary purpose of the tent was to serve as a shrine where oracles could be obtained.

9. *the pillar of cloud came down*: see above, p. 87, on Exod. 14: 19.

10. *they would all prostrate themselves*: since the pillar of cloud signified God's presence, all the people made a suitable act of homage to him when he was in their midst.

11. *The LORD would speak with Moses*: cp. Num. 12: 6-8; Deut. 34: 10. No other figure in Israel's religious history was accorded so high a position as Moses, as a mediator of God's will. The LORD spoke with him directly, whereas to other men he only communicated his will indirectly, through dreams, visions and other oracular means.

*but his young assistant*: cp. 24: 13; 32: 17, where Joshua is already introduced as the assistant of Moses who was destined to become his successor. \*

#### GOD'S PRESENCE IN PERSON

Moses said to the LORD, 'Thou bidst me lead this people <sup>12</sup> up, but thou hast not told me whom thou wilt send with me. Thou hast said to me, "I know you by name, and,



13 further, you have found favour with me." If I have indeed won thy favour, then teach me to know thy way, so that I can know thee and continue in favour with thee, for this 14 nation is thy own people.' The LORD answered, 'I will 15 go with you in person and set your mind at rest.' Moses said to him, 'Indeed if thou dost not go in person, do not 16 send us up from here; for how can it ever be known that I and thy people have found favour with thee, except by thy going with us? So shall we be distinct, I and thy 17 people, from all the peoples<sup>a</sup> on earth.' The LORD said to Moses, 'I will do this thing that you have asked, because you have found favour with me, and I know you by name.'

\* The dialogue that is set out here between Moses and God is concerned with the question of God's presence with the Israelites once they have departed from Sinai. It is assumed that God's presence is in some way so closely bound to the mountain that the journey away from it makes the continuance of that presence with the nation questionable. All that the LORD has so far promised is that his angel will go before Israel (Exod. 23: 20-3; 32: 34; 33: 2). This is regarded as less than adequate if the nation is truly to be God's people (verse 13). Thus God makes a solemn promise that he will accompany Israel, although nothing is said directly about how this promise is to be fulfilled. The instructions for the Tabernacle show how later generations regarded God's presence as linked with the Ark, and no doubt earlier generations found the presence of God at the sanctuaries where they worshipped. In a remarkable way the assurance of this presence is shown to rest on God's promise to Moses, and not on any image, or representation, of God himself. God's word, and not his visible image, provides the guarantee that he is with Israel.

12. *Thou bidst me lead this people up*: cp. Exod. 3: 8, 17; 6: 8.

[a] *So Sept.; Heb. people.*

*I know you by name:* Moses had been brought into such a close relationship to God that he was known in a personal and direct way, comparable to that by which men know each other.

13. *teach me to know thy way:* Moses requested to know how God truly wished to be served and worshipped, so that he might continue to mediate between him and the people. *thy own people:* so Exod. 19: 5-6.

16. *how can it ever be known:* anything less than the full presence of God with Israel, such as they had experienced on Sinai, would be less than a complete fulfilment of the promise given in the covenant. Israel's uniqueness as the people of the LORD was not only in its unique origin and way of life, but in the continuing presence of the LORD who was to be found in its worship. \*

#### MOSES' VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

And Moses prayed, 'Show me thy glory.' The LORD 18,19 answered, 'I will make all my goodness<sup>a</sup> pass before you, and I will pronounce in your hearing the Name JEHOVAH.<sup>b</sup> I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' But 20 he added, 'My face you cannot see, for no mortal man may see me and live.' The LORD said, 'Here is a place 21 beside me. Take your stand on the rock and when my 22 glory passes by, I will put you in a crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then 23 I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'

\* God's promise to accompany Israel raised the question of how his presence was to be seen and apprehended by men. In

[a] Or character.

[b] See note on 3: 15.



accordance with its deepest conviction and experience Israel accepted that God could not physically be seen by living men (cp. John 1: 18). Anyone who did so inadvertently could be punished by death (cp. Judg. 13: 22). How then could Israel know that the LORD really was with them if his presence could not be seen? This concluding narrative on the theme of God's presence shows that even Moses had not been granted the privilege of seeing God's face, which was beyond the power of men to apprehend, but had instead been permitted to see God's back. In Hebrew the word 'face' (Heb. *pānīm*) is used to denote a person's presence, and was used outside Israel to denote the 'presence' of a deity in an image. The knowledge that Moses had been allowed to see God's back was thus to serve Israel as an assurance of the reality of God's presence, even though he was always to remain the unseen God. This knowledge enhanced yet further the incomparable position of Moses. In a remarkable, related, narrative we learn later that Elijah fled to the same mountain, but saw no comparable vision of the glory of God (1 Kings 19: 9-12).

18. *Show me thy glory*: God's presence was synonymous with his glory, although in this ancient narrative the same theological precision is not given to the term as it possesses in the P narrative tradition.

19. *I will make all my goodness pass before you*: God is wholly good so that his *goodness* inevitably means his whole being. Similarly, God's name was regarded as the full expression of his identity, so that for God himself to pronounce his name, *JEHOVAH*, was tantamount to God disclosing his true nature and identity to Moses. No other person in the Old Testament, even among the later prophets, was to be so fully drawn into the inner counsels of God.

*I will be gracious*: God is entirely free to bestow his gifts on whom he will, so that no man can argue with his choice of Moses as the one to whom this special revelation is to be made. It is for God to choose, not man to argue.

21. *Here is a place beside me*: a place traditionally believed

to be where God put Moses was probably known to later generations of Israelites, and the incident of 1 Kings 19: 9 ff. suggests that the cave where Elijah heard God's voice was the same place. If so it may have at one time been a place of pilgrimage. \*

## THE RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT

The LORD said to Moses, 'Cut two stone tablets like the **34** first, and I will write on the tablets the words which were on the first tablets, which you broke in pieces. Be ready <sup>2</sup> by morning. Then in the morning go up Mount Sinai; stand and wait for me there on the top. No man shall go <sup>3</sup> up with you, no man shall even be seen anywhere on the mountain, nor shall flocks or herds graze within sight of that mountain.' So Moses cut two stone tablets like the <sup>4</sup> first, and he rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets in his hands. And the LORD came down <sup>5</sup> in the cloud and took his place beside him and pronounced the Name JEHOVAH. Then the LORD passed in front of him <sup>6</sup> and called aloud, 'JEHOVAH, the LORD, a god compassionate and gracious, long-suffering, ever constant and true, maintaining constancy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, <sup>7</sup> rebellion, and sin, and not sweeping the guilty clean away; but one who punishes sons and grandsons to the third and fourth generation for the iniquity of their fathers!' Moses made haste, bowed to the ground and prostrated <sup>8</sup> himself. He said, 'If I have indeed won thy favour, <sup>9</sup> O Lord, then may the Lord go in our company. However stubborn a people they are, forgive our iniquity and our sin and take us as thy own possession.'



- 10 The LORD said, Here and now I make a covenant. In full view of all your people I will do such miracles as have never been performed in all the world or in any nation. All the surrounding peoples shall see the work of the LORD, for fearful is that which I will do for you.<sup>a</sup>
- 11 Observe all I command you this day; and I for my part will drive out before you the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the
- 12 Jebusites. Be careful not to make a covenant with the natives of the land against which you are going, or they will
- 13 prove a snare in your midst. No: you shall demolish their altars, smash their sacred pillars and cut down their sacred
- 14 poles.<sup>b</sup> You shall not prostrate yourselves to any other god. For the LORD's name is the Jealous God, and a
- 15 jealous god he is. Be careful not to make a covenant with the natives of the land, or, when they go wantonly after their gods and sacrifice to them, you may be invited, any
- 16 one of you, to partake of their sacrifices, and marry your sons to their daughters, and when their daughters go wantonly after their gods, they may lead your sons astray too.
- 17 You shall not make yourselves gods of cast metal.
- 18 You shall observe the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread: for seven days, as I have commanded you, you shall eat unleavened cakes at the appointed time, in the month of Abib, because in the month of Abib you went out from Egypt.
- 19 Every first birth of the womb belongs to me, and the
- 20 males<sup>c</sup> of all your herds, both cattle and sheep. You may

[a] for fearful...for you: *or* (for he is to be feared) which I will do for you.

[b] sacred poles: *Heb.* asherim.

[c] *So Sept.; Heb. unintelligible.*

buy back the first birth of an ass by giving a sheep instead, but if you do not buy it, you must break its neck. You shall buy back all the first-born of your sons, and no one shall come into my presence<sup>a</sup> empty-handed.

For six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you<sup>21</sup> shall cease work; even at ploughing time and harvest you shall cease work.

You shall observe the pilgrim-feast of Weeks, the first-<sup>22</sup> fruits of the wheat harvest, and the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. Three times a year all<sup>23</sup> your males shall come into the presence of the Lord, the LORD the God of Israel; for after I have driven out the<sup>24</sup> nations before you and extended your frontiers, there will be no danger from covetous neighbours when you go up these three times to enter the presence of the LORD your God.

You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice at the<sup>25</sup> same time as anything leavened, nor shall any portion of the victim of the pilgrim-feast of Passover remain overnight till morning.

You shall bring the choicest firstfruits of your soil to<sup>26</sup> the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

The LORD said to Moses, 'Write these words down,<sup>27</sup> because the covenant I make with you and with Israel is in these words.' So Moses stayed there with the LORD<sup>28</sup> forty days and forty nights, neither eating nor drinking, and wrote down the words of the covenant, the Ten Words,<sup>b</sup> on the tablets.

[a] *Lit.* see my face.

[b] *Or* Ten Commandments.



\* Recorded here we have a further covenant ceremony, and the handing over to Moses of two new law tablets containing God's commandments. Coming after Israel's act of idolatry with the gold bull-calf, and the breaking of the original law tablets, the event represents an act of covenant renewal. It is significant, however, that the Ten Commandments given are not the same as those in 20: 2-17 and are now not in fact even ten in number (although they are referred to as such in verse 28). Further, the covenant ceremony described in verses 1-9 is in many respects parallel to that of Exod. 24: 1-11. Several features indicate that the present narrative is basically from J, whereas the earlier covenant ceremony reported in Exod. 19, 24 centres upon an account from E. What we have here then was originally the J account of how the covenant was made at Sinai, which has been introduced after the E account of the same event had been given a position of priority. Both the J and E accounts may go back to a common original story of the covenant on Sinai, and each reflects in its own way its particular interpretation of the covenant. That the E version has been put first is noteworthy, since J is generally regarded as older than E. By placing the J account here, and by linking it with the incident of the breaking of the original law tablets, it has become a story of covenant renewal instead of covenant making. This distinctive way of using earlier source material is not a clumsy literary device intended simply to preserve both accounts, but is the result of serious and prolonged reflection on the meaning of the Sinai covenant. Could the Sinai covenant be annulled by Israel's disobedience? The answer shown by the incident of the idolatry over the image of the gold bull-calf is that it certainly could, if Israel so flagrantly flouted God's laws as to turn to idolatry. Only as a result of God's forbearance had the original covenant been allowed to be renewed.

That a different set of commandments should be given from those set out in Exod. 20 is historically unexpected, but indicates that different traditions of the Ten Commandments of

Sinai at one time were in existence in early Israel. The editor has taken care to preserve both. This new set of commandments appears in verses 14-26, where an original series of ten (as stated in verse 28) has been added to at a later time, both by lengthening individual commandments and by adding to their number. The commands set out here are predominantly concerned with matters of worship, reflecting the view that what Sinai gave to Israel was primarily a new way of worship, whereas the commandments of Exod. 20 state more emphatically that this new way of worship was related to a new standard of conduct. The J source's brief account of the ritual making of the Sinai covenant is given in verses 27-8.

34: 1. *Cut two stone tablets like the first*: cp. 24: 12; 31: 18; 32: 15-16. Only here are we told that Moses cut the tablets out of the rock. The account in 32: 16 rather suggests that they were thought of as having been prepared entirely by God. Such tablets, inscribed with the covenant laws, would have formed a 'witness' or 'testimony' to the covenant's existence. Deut. 27: 2 refers to the setting up of two similar tablets of stone, inscribed with laws, on Mount Ebal (or Gerizim), near Shechem (Deut. 27: 4). From Deut. 10: 1-5, which is later than the account here, and the yet later P narrative of Exod. 25: 16, we learn that these tablets were to be kept in the Ark. Political treaties also made use of documents and inscribed stones as witnesses to a treaty agreement.

2. *wait for me there on the top*: the LORD is to descend on the mountain; cp. Exod. 19: 18, 20, which like the present account is from J.

3. *No man shall go up with you*: cp. 19: 12, 21, 24. For the removal of all animals from the mountain, cp. 19: 13. Such a prohibition indicated that the mountain was to be treated like a sanctuary, which was to be separated off from profane contact as a holy area.

5. *and pronounced the Name JEHOVAH*: cp. on 3: 15 and 33: 19. God's revelation of his name was an act of self-unveiling, for by knowledge of it Moses and Israel would



have the power to invoke God for help. Knowledge of the divine name was thus a very special knowledge of the nature of God himself. For the same reason any misuse of the name was a particularly serious offence (Exod. 20: 7), and any breach of the covenant by Israel would profane God's name. The fuller description of the divine name in verses 6-7, with its reference to the divine nature and activity, was no doubt at one time used as a formula of praise in worship. It comes as near as the Old Testament anywhere achieves to providing a confessional definition of God. Characteristically it concerns itself with his attitude towards men.

7. *one who punishes sons and grandsons*: cp. on 20: 5 for the legal significance of the reference to the 'third and fourth generation'.

9. *If I have indeed won thy favour*: cp. 33: 15-17.

10. *Here and now I make a covenant*: the original covenant of Sinai made in Exod. 19, 24 is regarded as broken, so that a fresh covenant has to be made.

*I will do such miracles*: a reference to God's assistance given to Israel which is to enable them to conquer the land of Canaan which has been promised to them. Particular examples of such miracles are found in Josh. 6: 1-27; 10: 12-13; Judg. 5: 20, but more generally the whole course of Israel's settlement in Canaan, involving the defeat of far superior forces, was regarded as a divine miracle; cp. Exod. 15: 14-16.

11. *and I for my part*: cp. 3: 8 for a similar list of the nations which inhabited Canaan.

12. *Be careful not to make a covenant*: cp. Josh. 9: 3-27 for an example of how the Israelites were tricked into making such a covenant. Such covenants were to be prohibited to Israel because they would give to the older inhabitants a legal right to stay in the land, and would thus lessen the fulfilment of God's promise. They would also involve Israel in recognizing the gods of these people, thus tempting them to idolatry (cp. Judg. 2: 2-3). In reality, however, Israel did not drive out all the previous inhabitants, a fact of which it was later fully aware (cp. Judg. 2: 20-3).

13. *smash their sacred pillars*: the open-air sanctuaries of the Canaanites usually had only very simple furnishings. Besides an altar where sacrifice could be offered, they usually contained an upright stone pillar and a wooden pole. These symbolized the male and female aspects of deity (cp. Jer. 2: 27). They were especially marked out for destruction because of their association with immorality practised in the name of religion.

14. *the Jealous God*: cp. on 20: 5 for the significance of this title.

17. *You shall not make yourselves gods of cast metal*: cp. Exod. 20: 4, where carved images are prohibited. The intention, however, is the same: to prohibit all images however they are made, whether carved from wood or stone, or cast in metal.

18. *You shall observe the pilgrim-feast of Unleavened Bread*: cp. Exod. 12-13; 23: 15 for this feast and its connection with Passover.

19. *Every first birth of the womb*: cp. on 13: 1-2.

20. *You may buy back the first birth of an ass*: the ass was not a suitable animal for sacrifice, and so if the owner kept a young first-born foal alive he had to compensate for it by sacrificing a sheep. Failing this the ass had to be killed, because it was holy and therefore forfeit to God.

*You shall buy back all the first-born of your sons*: cp. on 22: 29.

21. *For six days you shall work*: cp. on the sabbath law of Exod. 20: 8-11. Surprisingly here the seventh day is not explicitly called a sabbath, although the verb used for 'ceasing' (Heb. *shābat*) from work clearly points to this title. Even at the busiest periods of the agricultural year this rule was not to be broken.

22. *the pilgrim-feast of Weeks*: cp. on 23: 16 where the same feast is called 'the pilgrim-feast of Harvest'. The name 'pilgrim-feast of Weeks' is derived from the counting of seven weeks from the cutting of the first cereal crop (Deut. 16: 9-10). The festival is particularly related to the wheat harvest as the most important of the whole grain harvest.

*the pilgrim-feast of Ingathering*: cp. on 23: 16. This marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, and



so had a special significance as a New Year celebration in the oldest (pre-exilic) Israelite calendar.

24. *for after I have driven out the nations*: the festivals lasted several days, and in some cases the sanctuary would have been at a distance from an Israelite's home. Hence a danger existed that unscrupulous neighbours would take advantage of a farmer's absence from his land during a festival to take possession of parts of his property. God's promise to drive out the earlier inhabitants would remove this danger.

25. *You shall not offer . . . anything leavened*: cp. on 23: 18-19, where the same rulings are given.

28. *neither eating nor drinking*: the encounter with God was a most solemn spiritual experience, requiring a total fast. \*

#### THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES

29 At length Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two stone tablets of the Tokens in his hands, and when he descended, he did not know that the skin of his face shone  
30 because he had been speaking with the LORD. When Aaron and the Israelites saw how the skin of Moses' face  
31 shone, they were afraid to approach him. He called out to them, and Aaron and all the chiefs in the congregation  
32 turned towards him. Moses spoke to them, and afterwards all the Israelites drew near. He gave them all the commands with which the LORD had charged him on Mount  
33 Sinai, and finished what he had to say.

34 Then Moses put a veil over his face, and whenever he went in before the LORD to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. Then he would go out and tell  
35 the Israelites all the commands he had received. Whenever the skin of Moses' face shone in the sight of the Israelites, he would put the veil back over his face until he went in again to speak with the LORD.

\* In this section we have an account of how Moses' face shone when he came back down the mountain, and how, as a result of this, he devised a veil, or mask, which he could place over his face when confronting the people. Such a ritual mask would certainly have continued in use as a part of the priestly dress in Israel, and the account of its introduction by Moses serves to explain its origin and purpose.

Although the incident is set in the context of the Sinai revelation, it has only a loose connection with what precedes. As verses 34-5 show, it is primarily concerned with what used to happen regularly, rather than with what only happened once when Moses came down from the mountain. The reference in verse 34 to his 'going in before the LORD' indicates that we are concerned with a practice relating to Moses' going into the Tent of the Presence to receive oracles from God (cp. 33: 7-11). The narrative as a whole shows many verbal contacts with the P source, but the overall impression is of a very much earlier narrative which has been given a final editing by P.

29. *the two stone tablets of the Tokens*: cp. 25: 16, 21 for this description of the Sinai law tablets.

*the skin of his face shone*: the verb used to denote *shone* is very rare, and is similar in sound to the noun meaning 'horn'. Thus the Latin Vulgate translation refers to Moses being 'horned', and this has, in consequence, been taken up in many pictorial representations of the incident. Since, however, the verb has Moses' skin as its subject this cannot be the meaning, and the context clearly shows that a reference to 'glowing' or 'shining' is required.

34. *Then Moses put a veil over his face*: the word for *veil* simply denotes a 'covering', and we must deduce that this was a ritual mask of the type that has often been employed by priests. The mask was removed inside the holy place itself, and was only worn at certain times when Moses addressed the people. There are no other references to such a priestly mask being used in Israel, but the practice was widespread in



ancient religion, and the present account is intended to show that Moses himself both used and authorized such a practice. \*

## THE FULFILMENT OF GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

- 35 Moses called the whole community of Israelites together and thus addressed them: These are the LORD's commands to you: On six days you may work, but the seventh you are to keep as a sabbath of sacred rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever works on that day shall be put to death.
- 3 You are not even to light your fire at home on the sabbath day.
- 4 These words Moses spoke to all the community of Israelites: This is the command the LORD has given: Each of you set aside a contribution to the LORD. Let all who wish, bring a contribution to the LORD: gold, silver,
- 6 copper; violet, purple, and scarlet yarn; fine linen and goats' hair; tanned rams' skins, porpoise-hides, and acacia-
- 8 wood; oil for the lamp, perfume for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; cornelians and other stones ready
- 10 for setting in the ephod and the breast-piece. Let every craftsman among you come and make everything the LORD has commanded. The Tabernacle, its tent and cover-
- 12 ing, fasteners, planks, bars, posts, and sockets, the Ark and its poles, the cover and the Veil of the screen, the table,
- 13 its poles, and all its vessels, and the Bread of the Presence, the lamp-stand for the light, its fittings, lamps and the
- 15 lamp oil; the altar of incense and its poles, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance
- 16 of the Tabernacle, the altar of whole-offering, its bronze grating, poles, and all appurtenances, the basin and its
- 17 stand; the hangings of the court, its posts and sockets, and

the screen for the gateway of the court; the pegs of the 18  
Tabernacle and court and their cords, the stitched vest- 19  
ments for ministering in the Holy Place, that is the sacred  
vestments for Aaron the priest and the vestments for his  
sons when they minister as priests.

The whole community of the Israelites went out from 20  
Moses' presence, and everyone who was so minded 21  
brought of his own free will a contribution to the LORD  
for the making of the Tent of the Presence and all its  
service, and for the sacred vestments. Men and women 22  
alike came and freely brought clasps, earrings, finger-  
rings, and pendants,<sup>a</sup> gold ornaments of every kind, every  
one of them presenting a special gift of gold to the LORD.  
And every man brought what he possessed of violet, 23  
purple, and scarlet yarn, fine linen and goats' hair, tanned  
rams' skins and porpoise-hides. Every man, setting aside 24  
a contribution of silver or copper, brought it as a contri-  
bution to the LORD, and all who had acacia-wood suitable  
for any part of the work brought it. Every woman with 25  
the skill spun and brought the violet, purple, and scarlet  
yarn, and fine linen. All the women whose skill moved 26  
them spun the goats' hair. The chiefs brought cornelians 27  
and other stones ready for setting in the ephod and the  
breast-piece, the perfume and oil for the light, for the 28  
anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. Every Israelite 29  
man and woman who was minded to bring offerings to  
the LORD for all the work which he had commanded  
through Moses did so freely.

Moses said to the Israelites, 'Mark this: the LORD has 30  
specially chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the

[a] *Heb. word of uncertain mng.*



31 tribe of Judah. He has filled him with divine spirit, making  
32 him skilful and ingenious, expert in every craft, and  
a master of design, whether in gold, silver, and copper,  
33 or cutting precious stones for setting, or carving wood,  
34 in every kind of design. He has inspired both him and  
Aholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan to instruct  
35 workers and designers of every kind, engravers, seamsters,  
embroiderers in violet, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine  
linen, and weavers, fully endowing them with skill to  
36 execute all kinds of work. Bezalel and Aholiab shall work  
exactly as the LORD has commanded, and so also shall  
every craftsman whom the LORD has made skilful and  
ingenious in these matters, to know how to execute  
every kind of work for the service of the sanctuary.'

2 Moses summoned Bezalel, Aholiab, and every crafts-  
man to whom the LORD had given skill and who was  
3 willing, to come forward and set to work. They received  
from Moses every contribution which the Israelites had  
brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, but  
the people still brought freewill offerings morning after  
4 morning, so that the craftsmen at work on the sanctuary  
left what they were doing, every one of them, and came  
5 to Moses and said, 'The people are bringing much more  
than we need for doing the work which the LORD has  
6 commanded.' So Moses sent word round the camp that  
no man or woman should prepare anything more as a  
contribution for the sanctuary. So the people stopped  
7 bringing gifts; what was there already was more than  
enough for all the work they had to do.

8 Then all the craftsmen among the workers made the  
Tabernacle of ten hangings of finely woven linen, and

violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked on them, all made by a seamster. The length of each hanging <sup>9</sup> was twenty-eight cubits and the breadth four cubits, all of the same size. They joined five of the hangings together, <sup>10</sup> and similarly the other five. They made violet loops on <sup>11</sup> the outer edge of the one set of hangings and they did the same for the outer edge of the other set of hangings. They <sup>12</sup> made fifty loops for each hanging; they made also fifty loops for the end hanging in the second set, the loops being opposite each other. They made fifty gold fasteners, <sup>13</sup> with which they joined the hangings one to another, and the Tabernacle became a single whole.

They made hangings of goats' hair, eleven in all, to <sup>14</sup> form a tent over the Tabernacle; each hanging was thirty <sup>15</sup> cubits long and four cubits wide, all eleven of the same size. They joined five of the hangings together, and <sup>16</sup> similarly the other six. They made fifty loops on the edge <sup>17</sup> of the outer hanging in the first set and fifty loops on the joining edge of the second set, and fifty bronze fasteners <sup>18</sup> to join up the tent and make it a single whole. They made <sup>19</sup> for the tent a cover of tanned rams' skins and an outer covering of porpoise-hides.

They made for the Tabernacle planks of acacia-wood as <sup>20</sup> uprights, each plank ten cubits long and a cubit and a half <sup>21</sup> wide, and two tenons for each plank joined to each other. <sup>22</sup> They did the same for all the planks of the Tabernacle. They arranged the planks thus: twenty planks for the <sup>23</sup> south side, facing southwards, with forty silver sockets <sup>24</sup> under them, two sockets under each plank for its two tenons; and for the second or northern side of the <sup>25</sup> Tabernacle twenty planks with forty silver sockets, two <sup>26</sup>



27 under each plank. They made six planks for the far end  
28 of the Tabernacle on the west. They made two planks  
29 for the corners of the Tabernacle at the far end; at the  
bottom they were alike, and at the top, both alike,<sup>a</sup> they  
fitted into a single ring. They did the same for both of  
30 them at the two corners. There were eight planks with  
their silver sockets, sixteen sockets in all, two sockets under  
each plank.

31 They made bars of acacia-wood: five for the planks  
32 on the one side of the Tabernacle, five bars for the planks  
on the second side of the Tabernacle, and five bars for the  
planks on the far end of the Tabernacle on the west.  
33 They made the middle bar to run along from end to end  
34 half-way up the frames. They overlaid the frames with  
gold, made rings of gold on them to hold the bars and  
plated the bars with gold.

35 They made the Veil of finely woven linen and violet,  
purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked on it,  
36 all made by a seamster. And they made for it four posts  
of acacia-wood overlaid with gold, with gold hooks,  
37 and cast four silver sockets for them. For the entrance of  
the tent a screen of finely woven linen was made, em-  
38 broidered with violet, purple, and scarlet, and five posts  
of acacia-wood with their hooks. They overlaid the tops  
of the posts and the bands round them with gold; the  
five sockets for them were of bronze.

37 Bezalel then made the Ark, a chest of acacia-wood,  
two and a half cubits long, one cubit and a half wide, and  
2 one cubit and a half high. He overlaid it with pure gold,  
both inside and out, and put a band of gold all round it.

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. perfect.*

He cast four gold rings to be on its four feet, two rings <sup>3</sup> on each side of it. He made poles of acacia-wood and <sup>4</sup> plated them with gold, and inserted the poles in the rings <sup>5</sup> at the sides of the Ark to lift it. He made a cover of pure <sup>6</sup> gold, two and a half cubits long and one cubit and a half wide. He made two gold cherubim of beaten work at the <sup>7</sup> ends of the cover, one at each end; he made each cherub <sup>8</sup> of one piece with the cover. They had wings outspread and <sup>9</sup> pointing upwards, screening the cover with their wings; they stood face to face, looking inwards over the cover.

He made the table of acacia-wood, two cubits long, one <sup>10</sup> cubit wide, and one cubit and a half high. He overlaid it <sup>11</sup> with pure gold and put a band of gold all round it. He <sup>12</sup> made a rim round it a hand's breadth wide, and a gold band round the rim. He cast four gold rings for it, and <sup>13</sup> put the rings at the four corners by the four legs. The <sup>14</sup> rings, which were to receive the poles for carrying the table, were close to the rim. These carrying-poles he made <sup>15</sup> of acacia-wood and plated them with gold. He made the <sup>16</sup> vessels for the table, its dishes and saucers, and its flagons and bowls from which drink-offerings were to be poured; he made them of pure gold.

He made the lamp-stand of pure gold. The lamp-stand, <sup>17</sup> stem, and branches,<sup>a</sup> were of beaten work, its cups, both calyxes and petals, were of one piece with it. There were <sup>18</sup> six branches springing from its sides; three branches of the lamp-stand sprang from one side and three branches from the other side. There were three cups shaped like <sup>19</sup> almond blossoms, with calyx and petals, on the first branch, three cups shaped like almond blossoms, with

[a] *So Sam.; Heb. branch.*



calyx and petals, on the next branch, and similarly for all  
20 six branches springing from the lamp-stand. On the main  
stem of the lamp-stand there were four cups shaped like  
21 almond blossoms, with calyx and petals, and there were  
calyxes of one piece with it under the six branches which  
sprang from the lamp-stand, a single calyx under each  
22 pair of branches. The calyxes and the branches were of  
one piece with it, all a single piece of beaten work of pure  
23 gold. He made its seven lamps, its tongs and firepans of  
24 pure gold. The lamp-stand and all these fittings were made  
from one talent of pure gold.

25 He made the altar of incense of acacia-wood, square,  
a cubit long by a cubit broad and two cubits high, the  
26 horns of one piece with it. He overlaid it with pure gold,  
the top, the sides all round, and the horns, and he put  
27 round it a band of gold. He made pairs of gold rings for  
it; he put them under the band at the two corners on both  
28 sides to receive the poles by which it was to be carried. He  
made the poles of acacia-wood and overlaid them with gold.

29 He prepared the sacred anointing oil and the fragrant  
incense, pure, compounded by the perfumer's art.

**38** He made the altar of whole-offering of acacia-wood,  
square, five cubits long by five cubits broad and three  
2 cubits high. Its horns at the four corners were of one piece  
3 with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. He made all the  
vessels for the altar, its pots, shovels, tossing bowls, forks,  
4 and firepans, all of bronze. He made for the altar a grating  
of bronze network under the ledge, coming half-way up.  
5 He cast four rings for the four corners of the bronze  
6 grating to receive the poles, and he made the poles of  
7 acacia-wood and overlaid them with bronze. He inserted

the poles in the rings at the sides of the altar to carry it. He left the altar a hollow shell.

The basin and its stand of bronze he made out of the 8 bronze mirrors of the women who were on duty at the entrance to the Tent of the Presence.

He made the court. For the south side facing south- 9 wards the hangings of the court were of finely woven linen a hundred cubits long, with twenty posts and twenty 10 sockets of bronze; the hooks and bands on the posts were of silver. Along the north side there were hangings of 11 a hundred cubits, with twenty posts and twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks and bands on the posts were of silver. On the west side there were hangings fifty cubits long, 12 with ten posts and ten sockets; the hooks and bands on the posts were of silver. On the east side, towards the 13 sunrise, fifty cubits, there were hangings on either side of 14-15 the gateway of the court; they extended fifteen cubits to one corner, with their three posts and their three sockets, and fifteen cubits to the second corner, with their three posts and their three sockets. The hangings of the court 16 all round were of finely woven linen. The sockets for the 17 posts were of bronze, the hooks and bands on the posts of silver, the tops of them overlaid with silver, and all the posts of the court were bound with silver. The screen 18 at the gateway of the court was of finely woven linen, embroidered with violet, purple, and scarlet, twenty cubits long and five cubits high to correspond to the hangings of the court, with four posts and four sockets of 19 bronze, their hooks of silver, and the tops of them and their bands overlaid with silver. All the pegs for the 20 Tabernacle and those for the court were of bronze.



- 21 These were the appointments of the Tabernacle, that is the Tabernacle of the Tokens which was assigned by Moses to the charge of the Levites under Ithamar son of Aaron the priest. Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah made everything the LORD had commanded
- 22 Moses. He was assisted by Aholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan, an engraver, a seamster, and an embroiderer in fine linen with violet, purple, and scarlet yarn.
- 24 The gold of the special gift used for the work of the sanctuary amounted in all to twenty-nine talents seven
- 25 hundred and thirty shekels, by the sacred standard. The silver contributed by the community when registered was one hundred talents one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, by the sacred standard.
- 26 This amounted to a beka a head, that is half a shekel by the sacred standard, for every man from twenty years old and upwards, who had been registered, a total of six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty men.
- 27 The hundred talents of silver were for casting the sockets for the sanctuary and for the Veil, a hundred sockets to
- 28 a hundred talents, a talent to a socket. With the one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels he made hooks for the posts, overlaid the tops of the posts and put
- 29 bands round them. The bronze of the special gift came to
- 30 seventy talents two thousand four hundred shekels; with this he made sockets for the entrance to the Tent of the Presence, the bronze altar and its bronze grating, all the
- 31 vessels for the altar, the sockets all round the court, the sockets for the posts at the gateway of the court, all the pegs for the Tabernacle, and the pegs all round the court.
- 39 They used violet, purple, and scarlet yarn in making

the stitched vestments for ministering in the sanctuary and in making the sacred vestments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

They made the ephod of gold, with violet, purple, and 2 scarlet yarn, and finely woven linen. The gold was beaten 3 into thin plates, cut and twisted into braid to be worked in by a seamster with the violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. They made shoulder-pieces for it, joined 4 back and front. The waist-band on it was of the same 5 workmanship and material as the fabric of the ephod; it was gold, with violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely woven linen, as the LORD commanded Moses.

They prepared the cornelians, fixed in gold rosettes, 6 engraved by the art of a seal-cutter with the names of the sons of Israel, and fastened them on the shoulders of the 7 ephod as reminders of the sons of Israel, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

They<sup>a</sup> made the breast-piece; it was worked like the 8 ephod by a seamster, in gold, with violet, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely woven linen. They made the 9 breast-piece square, folded, a span long and a span wide. They set in it four rows of precious stones: the first row, 10 sardin, chrysolite and green felspar; the second row, purple 11 garnet, lapis lazuli and jade; the third row, turquoise, 12 agate and jasper; the fourth row, topaz, cornelian and 13 green jasper, all set in gold rosettes. The stones correspon- 14 ded to the twelve sons of Israel, name by name, each bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes engraved as on a seal. They made for the breast-piece twisted cords 15 of pure gold worked into a rope. They made two gold 16

[a] *So Sept.; Heb. He.*



rosettes and two gold rings, and they fixed the two rings  
17 on the two corners of the breast-piece. They fastened the  
two gold ropes to the two rings at those corners of the  
18 breast-piece, and the other ends of the two ropes to the  
two rosettes, thus binding them to the shoulder-pieces on  
19 the front of the ephod. They made two gold rings and  
put them at the two corners of the breast-piece on the  
20 inner side next to the ephod. They made two gold rings  
and fixed them on the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod,  
low down and in front, close to its seam above the waist-  
21 band on the ephod. They bound the breast-piece by its  
rings to the rings of the ephod with a violet braid, just  
above the waist-band on the ephod, so that the breast-  
piece would not become detached from the ephod; so the  
22 LORD had commanded Moses. They made the mantle of  
23 the ephod a single piece of woven violet stuff, with a hole  
in the middle of it which had a hem round it, with an  
24 oversewn edge<sup>a</sup> so that it could not be torn. All round its  
skirts they made pomegranates of violet, purple, and scarlet  
25 stuff, and finely woven linen.<sup>b</sup> They made bells of pure  
gold and put them all round the skirts of the mantle be-  
26 tween the pomegranates, a bell and a pomegranate alter-  
nately the whole way round the skirts of the mantle, to be  
worn when ministering, as the LORD commanded Moses.  
27 They made the tunics of fine linen, woven work, for  
28 Aaron and his sons, the turban of fine linen, the tall head-  
dresses and their bands all of fine linen, the drawers of  
29 finely woven linen, and the sash of finely woven linen,  
embroidered in violet, purple, and scarlet, as the LORD  
had commanded Moses.

[a] See 28: 32.

[b] linen: so Sam.; Heb. om.

They made a rosette of pure gold as the symbol of <sup>30</sup> their holy dedication, and inscribed on it as the engraving on a seal, 'Holy to the LORD',<sup>a</sup> and they fastened on it <sup>31</sup> a violet braid to fix it on the turban at the top, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Thus all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of the <sup>32</sup> Presence was completed, and the Israelites did everything exactly as the LORD had commanded Moses. They brought <sup>33</sup> the Tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings, its fasteners, planks, bars, posts and sockets, the covering <sup>34</sup> of tanned rams' skins and the outer covering of porpoise-hides, the Veil of the screen, the Ark of the Tokens and its <sup>35</sup> poles, the cover, the table and its vessels, and the Bread <sup>36</sup> of the Presence, the pure lamp-stand with its lamps in <sup>37</sup> a row and all its fittings, and the lamp oil, the gold altar, <sup>38</sup> the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the screen at the entrance of the tent, the bronze altar, the bronze <sup>39</sup> grating attached to it, its poles and all its furnishings, the basin and its stand, the hangings of the court, its posts and <sup>40</sup> sockets, the screen for the gateway of the court, its cords and pegs, and all the equipment for the service of the Tabernacle for the Tent of the Presence, the stitched vest- <sup>41</sup> ments for ministering in the sanctuary, that is the sacred vestments for Aaron the priest and the vestments for his sons when they minister as priests. As the LORD had com- <sup>42</sup> manded Moses, so the Israelites carried out the whole work. Moses inspected all the work, and saw that they <sup>43</sup> had carried it out according to the command of the LORD; and he blessed them.

[a] on it. . . LORD: or 'JEHOVAH' on it in sacred characters as engraved on a seal.



\* After a brief initial admonition not to work on the sabbath, and an account of the voluntary gifts from the Israelites which provided the materials, chapters 35-9 report how the instructions for making and arranging the sanctuary given in chapters 25-31 were carried out. Like the original instructions this account of their fulfilment belongs to the P source, and to a considerable extent a close similarity of wording with the original instructions is maintained. Several features indicate that this narrative was composed at a somewhat later stage than the account of their communication to Moses. Some changes, as for example the lack of any mention of the Urim and Thummim in chapter 39, are noticeable. Nevertheless basically the account given simply repeats what has already been laid down in the instructions for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Its entire theme is well summarized in 39: 42: *As the LORD had commanded Moses, so the Israelites carried out the whole work.*

35: 3. *You are not even to light your fire at home:* the author feels the importance of observing the sabbath to be such that he introduces here a further warning that it is not to be broken, even for so high a task as building the Tabernacle. The prohibition against lighting a fire on the sabbath is not explicitly made elsewhere, suggesting to some commentators that it may once have been a very basic aspect of sabbath observance. This, however, is a very hazardous conclusion, and the present passage is not really concerned to introduce a new regulation but to serve as a reminder that the sabbath is not to be broken even for work of a specifically sacred character.

5. *Each of you set aside a contribution to the LORD:* the obligation to build a costly sanctuary is given a distinctly personal and spiritual character by the command that all the materials should be provided by individual voluntary contributions. Depending on the tradition that Israel had obtained costly materials from the Egyptians, the author affirms the spiritual principle that the cost of divine service is to be borne willingly by gifts offered in response to God's own supreme gift of freedom and salvation. In the outcome

such voluntary gifts produce more than is needed (36: 5, 7), thus providing an example of generosity to be emulated by later generations of Israelites.

38: 3. *tossing bowls*: for throwing the blood against the altar.

24. *The gold of the special gift*: the information given in 38: 24-31 regarding the amount of gold, silver and bronze used in making the sanctuary furnishings presupposes the census list of Israelites given in Num. 1; cp. Exod. 38: 26 with Num. 1: 45-6. The information thus appears here rather early, in anticipation of the census which is not taken until later. Once again the amounts given are surprising in view of the situation of the Israelites, but are intended to show the generosity of those who had experienced the LORD's salvation, and the beauty of his sanctuary.

26. *a beka a head*: the beka, or half-shekel, weighed approximately 5.8 grammes. See pp. 194-5.

39: 8. *They made the breast-piece*: its full title, the breast-piece of judgement (28: 15), is not used here, and no mention is made of the Urim and Thummim. This reflects the fact that the practice of using the Urim and Thummim for obtaining oracles was discontinued sometime after the exile, and the breast-piece here has only a symbolic significance. \*

#### THE CONSECRATION AND ERECTION OF THE NEW SANCTUARY

The LORD spoke to Moses and said: On the first day of the 40<sup>1,2</sup> first month you shall set up the Tabernacle, the Tent of the Presence. You shall put the Ark of the Tokens in it 3 and screen the Ark with the Veil. You shall bring in the 4 table and lay it; then you shall bring in the lamp-stand and mount its lamps. You shall then set the gold altar of 5 incense in front of the Ark of the Tokens and put the screen of the entrance of the Tabernacle in place. You 6 shall put the altar of whole-offering in front of the



7 entrance of the Tabernacle, the Tent of the Presence. You shall put the basin between the Tent of the Presence and  
8 the altar and put water in it. You shall set up the court all round and put in place the screen of the gateway of the  
9 court. You shall take the anointing oil and anoint the Tabernacle and everything in it; thus you shall consecrate  
10 it and all its furnishings, and it shall be holy. You shall anoint the altar of whole-offering and all its vessels; thus  
11 shall you consecrate it, and it shall be most holy. You shall anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate it. You  
12 shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of the Presence and wash them with the water. Then you  
13 shall clothe Aaron with the sacred vestments, anoint him and consecrate him; so shall he be my priest. You shall  
14 then bring forward his sons, clothe them in tunics, anoint them as you anointed their father, and they shall be my  
15 priests. Their anointing shall inaugurate a hereditary priesthood for all time.

16 Exactly as the LORD had commanded him, so Moses did.  
17 In the first month of the second year, on the first day of that month, the Tabernacle was set up.

18 Moses set up the Tabernacle. He put the sockets in place, inserted the planks, fixed the crossbars and set up  
19 the posts. He spread the tent over the Tabernacle and fixed the covering of the tent above it, as the LORD had  
20 commanded him. He took the Tokens and put them in the Ark, inserted the poles in the Ark, and put the cover over  
21 the top of the Ark. He brought the Ark into the Tabernacle, set up the Veil of the screen and so screened the Ark  
22 of the Tokens, as the LORD had commanded him. He put the table in the Tent of the Presence on the north side of

the Tabernacle outside the Veil and arranged bread on it <sup>23</sup> before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded him. He <sup>24</sup> set the lamp-stand in the Tent of the Presence opposite the table at the south side of the Tabernacle and mounted <sup>25</sup> the lamps before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded him. He set up the gold altar in the Tent of the Presence <sup>26</sup> in front of the Veil and burnt fragrant incense on it, as <sup>27</sup> the LORD had commanded him. He set up the screen at the <sup>28</sup> entrance of the Tabernacle, fixed the altar of whole- <sup>29</sup> offering at the entrance of the Tabernacle, the Tent of the Presence, and offered on it whole-offerings and grain-offerings, as the LORD had commanded him. He set up the <sup>30</sup> basin between the Tent of the Presence and the altar and put water there for washing, and Moses and Aaron and <sup>31</sup> his sons used to wash their hands and feet when they <sup>32</sup> entered the Tent of the Presence or approached the altar, as the LORD had commanded Moses. He set up the court <sup>33</sup> all round the Tabernacle and the altar, and put a screen at the gateway of the court.

Thus Moses completed the work, and the cloud covered <sup>34</sup> the Tent of the Presence, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses was unable to enter the Tent of the <sup>35</sup> Presence, because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. At every stage <sup>36</sup> of their journey, when the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites broke camp; but if the cloud did not lift from <sup>37</sup> the Tabernacle, they did not break camp until the day it lifted. For the cloud of the LORD hovered over the <sup>38</sup> Tabernacle by day, and there was fire in the cloud by night, and the Israelites could see it at every stage of their journey.



\* This section brings to a close the account of the revelation of God at Sinai by reporting the consecration of the parts of the new sanctuary and their erection. Then, when all is complete, the visible sign of the divine approval is given by the descent of the cloud of the divine glory into the Tabernacle. This represents God's very presence dwelling with Israel in accordance with the promise given in 25: 22; 29: 45-6. The whole account belongs to the P source, although even within this the material is not all of one age. When the glory of the LORD dwells with Israel then, in the eyes of the P tradition, the purpose of God's revelation at Sinai is realized in the existence of a legitimate and worthy form of worship of him. Then Israel knows the LORD (29: 46), and this brings to a fulfilment the promise made long before to the patriarch Abraham that the God who had first revealed himself to Abraham would become the God of his descendants in a very special way (Gen. 17: 7).

The present chapter contains three separate sections. Verses 1-15 tell of the rite of anointing performed on all the furnishings of the sanctuary and finally upon Aaron and his sons. This rite is a sign of consecration by which God hallows the objects and persons through which his presence is to be mediated to Israel. By it the sanctuary and its furnishings were incorporated into the sphere of divine holiness with all its attendant dangers and restrictions. Verses 16-33 then narrate the setting up of the Tabernacle and the inclusion within it of the various items of religious furniture. The third section, verses 34-8, brings both the chapter and the whole account of the revelation at Sinai to a close with a report of God's glory entering the Tabernacle. This serves both as an initial sign of divine approval, and as an indication of the divine guidance which is to lead Israel through the wilderness into the land which had been promised to it. The book of Exodus comes to a close therefore with the departure from Sinai, and with an anticipation of the recommencement of the journey through the wilderness which is taken up in Numbers.

40: 4. *You shall bring in the table and lay it:* i.e. place upon it the various basins and utensils which were required for use in the sanctuary (cp. 25: 29-30).

17. *In the first month of the second year:* cp. 19: 1 for a previous chronological reference. A year has elapsed since the departure from Egypt, and the erection of the Tabernacle is appropriately dated to the first day of the first month of the year, which thereafter marked the beginning of a sacred festival.

35. *Moses was unable to enter:* God's presence was so awe-inspiring in its holiness, that even Moses could not enter the sanctuary. Cp. Isa. 6: 4 for God's presence filling the temple.

The story of Israel's journey through the wilderness to the land of Canaan is resumed in Numbers, which begins with an account of the taking of the census which has already been referred to in Exod. 30: 11 ff. Before this resumption, however, there is given in Leviticus a very substantial compendium of regulations, laws and instructions which elaborate still further the demand that has been placed upon Israel by the covenant of Sinai. The end of the book of Exodus therefore marks the close of a chapter rather than the close of a story. \*

\* \* \* \* \*



## A NOTE ON FURTHER READING

For more detail regarding the critical problems raised by Exodus, both as to its literary origin and historical significance, the reader should consult the commentaries by M. Noth, *Exodus* (Old Testament Library), SCM Press (London, 1962) and by J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus* (Century Bible, New Series), Oliphants (London, 1971).

There are a number of useful studies devoted to particular problems and subjects arising in the book of Exodus. The presentation of the work of Moses is dealt with very skilfully by G. von Rad in a short book entitled *Moses* (World Christian Books), Lutterworth Press (London, 1960) in which he shows how the different sources, J, E and P, present differing pictures of Moses which reflect their own contemporary religious interests. The book *Moses* by Martin Buber, East and West Library (Oxford and London, 1946), is the work of a distinguished Jewish philosopher who seeks to demonstrate the creative originality of the work of Moses.

The historical problem of the exodus from Egypt, as seen in the light of archaeological evidence, is very fully set out and analysed by H. H. Rowley in *From Joseph to Joshua* (Schweich Lectures), Oxford University Press (London, 1950), in which he reconstructs his own chronology of the major events. For a detailed analysis of the J and E accounts of the making of the covenant of Sinai, and a reconstruction of the history through which the tradition passed before being written down, two useful studies are available. The first, by W. Beyerlin, *The Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions*, B. H. Blackwell (Oxford, 1965), emphasizes the early preservation of the account of what happened in the context of an annual act of worship. A similar view is followed independently by M. L. Newman, *The People of the Covenant. A Study of Israel from Moses to the Monarchy*, Carey-Kingsgate Press (London,

1965), who also notes the different religious interests of the J and E records.

For the Ten Commandments several good recent studies are available. *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research* (Studies in Biblical Theology, New Series No. 2), SCM Press (London, 1967), gives a thorough survey of recent studies of the individual laws and of their collection into this series. *The Ten Commandments in New Perspective* by E. Nielsen (Studies in Biblical Theology, New Series No. 7), SCM Press (London, 1968), attempts a more independent explanation of their origin. A full discussion of the significance of these commandments in the context of other Israelite laws, and of ancient Near Eastern law in general, is given by A. C. J. Phillips in *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law*, B. H. Blackwell (Oxford, 1971).



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